

**The Ramakrishna Mission
Institute of Culture Library**

**Presented by
Dr. Baridbaran Mukerji**

RMICL-8

11698

11698

UNSCIENTIFIC ESSAYS

UNSCIENTIFIC ESSAYS

BY
FREDERIC WOOD JONES

M.B., D.Sc.

ELDER PROFESSOR OF ANATOMY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

Author of "Arboreal Man," etc.

LONDON
EDWARD ARNOLD & CO.

1923

[All rights reserved]

11,698

To
MY WIFE

L - R.C.
L - R.A.
R.A.

*Made and Printed in Great Britain by
Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London*

Preface

THESE pages are the products of idle moments. Though a man's calling may be a well-defined one, and circumscribed by narrow and traditional boundaries, it may yet be permitted to him to wander at times far away from his own small sphere. A blacksmith may meditate upon buttercups whilst he is shaving of a morning. Some of the idle moments have been passed in London, some in Australia, and some upon a coral island. The products of these idle moments had no purpose, and they represent no more than a desire for the expression of things too trivial and too inexact to be reckoned as scientific.

Contents

	PAGE
I OF MARVELS	9
II OF WORDS AND SOME LITTLE EMO- TIONS	14
III OF FIREFLIES AND CERTAIN DAYS .	25
IV OF AN EVIL SPIRIT	30
V OF MEMORY	43
VI OF THE SEA-SERPENT	47
VII OF INHERITANCE	59
VIII OF THE CRAB'S SECRET	65
IX OF BARKING	78
X OF WER-TIGERS	82
XI OF HEALING	95
XII OF COCO-NUTS AND PROVIDENCE .	102
XIII OF SEALS AND SEA-BIRDS . . .	111
XIV OF MOON-GAZING	118
XV OF A HORSE MUSTER	130
XVI OF OILY PATCHES	138

Contents

XVII	OF CORAL ISLANDS AND CLAYPANS	148
XVIII	OF THE DEVIL AND SOME OF HIS WORKS	160
XIX	OF OPALS AND SNEEZING	169
XX	OF LONGING	179
XXI	OF SIGHTS AND SCENTS	190
XXII	OF ARGUMENT	198

Of Marvels

IT may be a very simple thing that sets a man thinking, and the merest triviality that turns him altogether from some course, or determines him to pursue it to the bitter end. What would have happened to Robert Bruce had spiders not made their home in his hiding-place it is difficult to imagine. A spider may cause a man to continue an uphill fight ; a fly may cause him to wreck his home.

One day some simple detail of Nature's scheme will strike a plain man as being so wonderful that he will pause ; and in that pause he may, for the first time, be overwhelmed with the realization of his own utter insignificance, and of the certain presence of a guiding power.

A sailor-man, and one who had seen many things, and was clever in his way, once told me that, having witnessed all the wonders of

Unscientific Essays

the world, nothing had ever puzzled him so much, nor had excited his admiration to the same degree as the finger-nails of a new-born baby. He could understand everything else about a new-born baby, but the fact that it had complete finger-nails staggered him, and left him conscious of his own triviality in the scheme of things. That sailor-man was coming very near to the realization of the philosopher who declared that were there no other signs of the presence of the Deity he could for a surety see God in the human thumb. It is remarkable what diverse circumstances have compelled men to a certainty in their knowledge of a Deity. Rainbows, sunsets, comets, and magnificent displays of force or grandeur we may pass by ;—for one it is a baby's finger and for another a thumb. That one should by reason, or by teaching, persuade some fellow, on a sudden, of the reality of the presence of God, would be a great triumph and one not often witnessed. But in a moment a trivial thing may bring about this wonder before our very eyes. At the top end of Regent Street there was a shop devoted to the sale of incubators. As an attraction to possible purchasers there were incubators at work displayed in the shop

Of Marvels

window. One miserable night when it was blowing, as it does down Regent Street, a fierce cold draught rather than a wind, I looked through the window at the little chickens that, in their heated boxes, were all unconscious of the cold without. Only one other passer-by was similarly interested ; and he was a poor wretch who looked at the fluffy yellow things, with their plenty and their warmth, with envy rather than with admiration. But as we gazed we saw, and in the same moment, that one compartment, which contained nothing but eggs, had become animated. One egg cracked and heaved, and, after a moment, burst asunder as a bedraggled chicken staggered into worldly life. My attention, which had been wholly given to the egg, was suddenly claimed by the man. He was transformed. His eyes were riveted upon the tottering yellow thing and the empty eggshell. "That's a thing to have seen," he said. "You can't tell me after this that there's no such thing as God." He had realized it—the baby's finger-nails for the sailor, but the hatching chicken for the London waif,—and he left the window of the incubator shop a different man.

To anyone who has travelled the whole

Unscientific Essays

length of the Great Barrier Reef of Australia there are memories never to be forgotten. From Thursday Island to the Tropic of Capricorn is a succession of beautiful scenes. To visit a claypan full of water, when all else around for countless miles of the desert interior has been dry and parched for months, is an impressive experience. At such a claypan I met a man who lived upon its margins for months at a time. He was used to it all, he had become familiar with the ever-changing flocks of birds that come to the only water in all that region. He was interested in it, and he was a good observer of birds, but he could not share my admiration for their wonderful beauty, for their countless numbers, or for their perpetual comings and goings. No, he had seen something more wonderful. Something which made the flocks of birds, with which he lived, seem trivial and insignificant. He had, when following the sea, sailed down the Barrier Reef and through the Hinchinbrook Pass. As he confided to me on the last evening of my stay, and when I had, for a moment, taken my attention from a wheeling flock of Galahs—"No one can sail through the Hinchinbrook Pass and not believe in God."

Of Marvels

It would be worth considering if the Federal authorities could make it possible that the entire population of Australia should make annual passage of the Hinchinbrook Pass.

Of Words and some Little Emotions

I SUPPOSE that when, in the primeval forest, our hairy ancestors learned to speak instead of expressing their thoughts by a wag of their tails or a display of their teeth, they fancied themselves highly for their accomplishments ;—and they did so rightly, for they had made their biggest step. There can be no doubt that the primitive swain who first said to his adored one “ I love you ” was more likely to succeed in his amours than he who in order to express his tender feelings must chase the fair one from tree to tree, and by a diligent attention to the lady’s parasites demonstrate that he was possessed by the great emotion that makes the world go round. When all men are of necessity silent, he who can say anything—be it never so little—will be the orator ; he will sway their politics, will rule and order their lives, and—what is of more importance—he will win the love of their

Of Words and some Emotions

womankind. The hairy being who could say "I love you," and perchance add a word or two of flattery or endearment, was the one who would leave his impress on the race :— and in truth he was as well equipped as the swain of to-day, for when all the finery is done away with, when gewgaws, trinkets, and love tokens are left out, what is there save the simple "I love you" that wins the maid to-day and keep the race a-moving ?

Since those primitive days—happy days, I imagine them—man has had the fashioning of a mighty array of words, and he is not done with the business yet. It is the misfortune of our language that to-day it is the handiwork of grown-up men ; our words are grown men's words, and it is a pity that it is so—every child will tell you that it is. Grown men are for ever making words, for they are for ever finding new things that they must name and mis-name ; they are for ever making new abominations, machines that kill in a thousand ways, machines that shriek, machines that stink, machines designed to make life more easy, but which fill our asylums with demented creatures and our hospitals and streets with pale-faced wrecks that God did not intend to

Unscientific Essays

cope with anything more terrifying than His own great handiwork. All the abortions of a restless age must be named, and it is a just compensation that man has a happy way of giving names to his creatures so crude, so brutal in their sound, that the names themselves are a fitting warning against the creatures of his own disordered making. Who that lived with an open sky would be tempted to long for a sphygmograph, or would pine for a dynamometer even if he knew not what they were?

Grown-up man is so engaged in the coining of nightmare names for his misshapen offspring that to children is left the naming of a hundred feelings—our most trivial and yet most innate emotions—that grown-up man forgets and does not heed. Through all time, probably, children have felt the need to name feelings and sensations that are heeded by them, but are forgotten in familiarity or neglect by their elders; and the children's language, though it is not a written one, or even a constant one, is a very important item indeed. There are many of these strange child words; school words, family words, or even individuals' words to express the little impressions that, though common to all ages, are noticed most by

Of Words and some Emotions

children. Children in their languages have time and again made useful words, just primitive creatures of their own childish fancy, but words that express realities for which the wretched grown-up has no synonym. Such words are usually forgotten when the age comes at which we put away all childish things.

In child vocabularies are words that convey to the children using them such ideas as the feel of a rough-handed person fingering silk, the feeling of the "crunch" of cotton wool or snow, the sound of a finger-nail drawn across a rough-covered book, or the sound of a slate-pencil on slate—all of them things to which some children have a peculiar dislike. A peculiar quality attaches to the cinder discovered by surprise in the gravy, to the hard bit struck in the otherwise soft cake, to the powdery dry piece occasionally met with in the porridge, or to the characteristic gritty grating of the broken edges of china—these, too, have had their child names bestowed. And, again, the childish flight goes further, and children make words for such complex sensations as the feeling that one is not alone, that one is being looked at, that something is going to happen, or that one has forgotten

Unscientific Essays

something. All these feelings most of us carry to our life's end, though among all our adult emotions they become insignificant ; and our words for them are forgotten. Children have shown the most marvellous ingenuity in inventing adjectives of such complexity that they convey the quality of such things as a person who fits his name, a person who, no matter where he is, does not seem to be noticed, a person who is grown up for his age, a person who always wears something brown even if he cannot wear everything brown—all these persons we know, but now we have to make up round-about expressions for them when we would name them. It is the neglect of grown-up men to name these minor things that leads to the development of "slang." It is the evolution of child words that brings in its train the birth of the many and wonderful "secret languages," to which a certain age of childhood has paid so much attention. It is a fortunate thing that there are some people who, whilst growing older, yet do not "grow up," and who still, when they should long ago have left such things behind, can spare time to think as children think, and share those little emotions which are so real to children. If you

Of Words and some Emotions

are really grown up you will not understand this ; but if you are really grown up you will probably not have read so far.

The grown men of all languages have not been so negligent of naming our trivial feelings as have those of ours, and that is so probably because all nations are not so grown-up as we are. The Malays are still children in many ways—Nature's best children—and the island Malays have some splendid words that know no dictionary English equivalent at all. Some of these words, strangely enough, find their parallels only in the words coined by children ; and yet the emotions with which they deal are by no means childish, for in most of us they long outlast childhood. There is in our island language a word that for want of any orthodox orthography I shall spell g'mas : it is probably of Javanese origin, and it is a word for which I can give no single English equivalent as a translation, and can only represent one particular instance of g'mas by a simple English phrase—you are g'mas when you want to bite, but you do not want to hurt. Although I give so poor a translation of this word I can tell you several emotions to which the adjective g'mas is properly applied. If

Unscientific Essays

you watch a child play with a kitten or a puppy, you will see him stroke it, talk to it, and pat it ; but, as apparently merely a substitute for a more vehement pat, he will likely give its tail a violent twist or its ear a most unmerciful pull. He is corrected and told not to be cruel : that child is not cruel, he is g'mas.

You may see a little boy who is playing with his little girl friend : he will be very fond of her, he will give up his toys to her, he will do his utmost to push any other little boy away ; but just as likely as he will caress her he will have her by the neck and pull her hair : he, too, is corrected by wondering grown-ups for being rough—he is g'mas. Grown-ups are g'mas as well. A spinster has her pet dog, she caresses it, but she talks to it, when she caresses it most, with her teeth clenched ; and when she would be specially demonstrative she almost hisses her endearments to the wretched animal—she is g'mas. You will understand g'mas every time you watch a young mother with her baby. She holds it, she looks at it, and her eyes are fixed on the baby ; perhaps she shakes it, she says her baby-talk to it with the same curious shutting of the teeth as the spinster used to her dog ;

Of Words and some Emotions

and then, with almost a hiss and a shake, she perchance gives it a smack and then hugs it close with a kiss far more like a bite than an ordinary kiss of salutation ; the young mother is g'mas. You may think her picture crude ; but how often have you seen mothers pretend to bite their babies, pretend to smack them hard, always with all the expression and gesture of reality, and the baby is more clever than the grown-up, for he knows it is g'mas and does not mind it. Most lovers are g'mas, and if half our servant maids were treated nearly so roughly by their rivals as they are by their "young men," assault cases would never cease to occupy the time of police courts.

So much will give you some idea of g'mas. Now I turn to that wonderful collection of child words known as "the Berkshire gabble," and I find the note, "creamy, adj. = the desire to squeeze a little fat cat or a baby." Children know it, you see, for the little girl who coined this word in the "gabble" was only ten ; and who will tell me that the grown-ups are wiser than the children and the Malays, when they have no word to express an emotion that is felt by the greater part of all humanity ; for when you have taken children, mothers,

Unscientific Essays

and lovers from the world, you have nothing left worth talking about.

Can you think of a convenient word to make you understand the going of such things as water from a puddle in the sunshine, as the cloth which goes from the elbows and knees of your clothes, as the flame from a match when it burns out, or the exit of the thousand things that go utterly from this world. They "disappear" or they "vanish," it is true, and yet I think they do more than that, for they go utterly : it is not that one moment you see them and the next you do not, and all the while you know where they are ; but they go, they just go entirely from where they were, and the place thereof knows them no more. In the word of the Island Malay they gype. It is gype when the candle flame goes out : it is gype when the wind that laid low the palms is utterly lost in that great stretch in which all round the Island the sea meets the sky—or somewhere beyond that meeting line. Were there no such thing as gype, men would be forced to stop making pins and buttons and things, for enough of all these have been turned out long ago to satisfy all mankind. This, too, is a child idea, and one that has been

Of Words and some Emotions

wonderfully elaborated in child vocabularies. A child sees lots of things to which my island word may be applied, lots of things that just quietly go from here and are lost. They are not things that people destroy or intentionally give an exit to ; they are not broken up, killed, or driven from this world ; they just go quietly. Some even seem to steal back again. Somewhere off the earth there must be a big repository for the fluff that goes from your garments, for the rain in the little puddles that go so quickly in the sun, for the flames that go out, for the darkness that steals away as day comes on. This place a child, whose vocabulary is recorded in the "gabble," has made a concrete and immortal territory under the name of Bomattle. There, in Bomattle, is a great collection of all these things, and at times they only rest there, for some of them come back. Whence comes the fluff which, so long as you wear your clothes, you may find at the bottom of your pockets ? It comes from Bomattle, and it probably only rested there awhile after it had gone from your elbows. From Bomattle the rain comes back to the puddles, the darkness returns when the sun sets, and the flame when the taper is put to the fire again.

Unscientific Essays

It is a big place Bomattle, and very, very far away, and there must be a very strange collection of things stowed away there ; the thousand things that quietly go utterly away, you would find all these lying in Bomattle. But some things never return.

Of Fireflies and Certain Days

ALL days are not alike even to the most stolid of men. There are days when every one of us has felt some strange call afield, days when we have mounted the white horse of imagination, and rescued the princess from the dragon.

Such days, I imagine, call humanity less frequently as the race grows old. We have so far grown aloof from the rest of Nature's children that, were it not for the occasional magic day, the influence of which we cannot ignore, we would altogether fail to understand the calls that come to lesser things.

Many years ago, the road from Singapore to Tanglin passed through stretches of the most luxuriant tropical vegetation. At the lower part of the road all things were wet. There was a drip from every leaf ; and on a splendid tropic night that was the place for jungle sounds. But on that part of the road,

more than at any other place I ever knew, were lights—the beautiful lights of fireflies. As you journeyed down the Tanglin road on a dark, moist night, there was a sudden flash of light from the tangle bordering your path. And at once another and another, and hundreds at a time, and for a space the road would be lit with a bewildering dance of lights, all turned on in a moment. But no sooner had you realized the thing in all its beauty than, as the snuffing of a candle, every light was gone. Had all the fireflies on the Tanglin road been electric lights, operated from a single key, they could not have been more of a mind as to glowing or remaining dark in harmony.

There are scenes, which come readily to the memory, of long-drawn streaks of grey. Grey above, and grey below, and all very wide, and silent, and lonely. The mud banks where the river meets the sand-banks of the sea. For some, the space, the waste of level tide flats, the cold colouring, and the dismal cries of some shore bird, produce only a feeling of oppressive loneliness. But there are those who love such scenes. There are men who gaze on the flat greyiness of an estuary, with all the joy that others have from viewing mountain

Of Fireflies

scenery. If such a place please you or no, it is at least certain that there you will see one of the wonders of the world. Along the sand flats, where the water shallows with the falling tide, hundreds of sand-coloured wading birds are feeding. Maybe it is your coming that alarms them. On an instant they have taken to flight. In one moment, what appeared as a few birds running, with little starts and pauses, along the water's edge, is an immense flock wheeling with marvellous precision in the air. One moment and the whole flock flashes white, as, with one mind, a thousand birds turn in the air, revealing the white under-surface of their wings. Next instant the whole company is invisible, for, with another manœuvre, it is the sand-coloured back that is turned towards you. Now they are almost lost to sight, as specks against the shining water far out in the estuary. Then, on a sudden, they have turned, and flying low along the sand are past their old feeding ground, and wheeling far beyond. Now these birds are flying at a great pace, and they are flying in a very densely packed flock. There is no obvious leader ; there are no audible words of command. Yet, in a flash, every

one of the whole multitude has altered his course by exactly the same degree, has canted his planes at exactly the same angle, and, though the whole flock may foul a telegraph wire, no individual member of the whole dense mass ever flies foul of his neighbours. One bird which did not receive the message, or mistook it, or forgot its directions, and the whole flock would be in disorder. But any day we may witness this wonder ; the marvel of an impulse coming at once to thousands, and producing on an instant the same response in a myriad of little, long-legged, wading birds.

Some evenings I may sit on my veranda, and, when work is done, enjoy some freshness after a day of heat and glare and dust. But there are some evenings when no man may stay in comfort on his verandah when the lights are turned up. And there is a curious quality in these evenings. Some folk may recognize them by their character even before the insects come ; by all they are recognized after the insects have arrived.

There are days when all life is called to by one voice, and at one time. Days when all life awakes. The ants will tell you of

Of Fireflies

these days before noon, the moths repeat the story later in the day.

There are days when even man shares some strange call with all Nature's children. The day when the ledger clerk is a knight of King Arthur ; the day when the ants walk high on their legs, and reveal their millions. The day when most folk would wish to be something better, and when all have a longing for something to which they can give no name.

What calls on a sudden to the fireflies ? What instantly obeyed word of command runs, as a flash, through a flock of sandpipers ? Man cannot tell. When he shares such a call he cannot hear the word of command, nor tell whence it comes. The story of the child Samuel might be pondered by those to whom a restless feeling comes on the days when the ants walk high on their legs.

IV.

Of an Evil Spirit

I ONCE knew a sailor-man who assured me that one of the coincidences of his life was that on stepping ashore in any port in any part of the world he got no farther than the quay before he saw a little yellow dog. I believed that man, for he told me many other tales more strange than that, and I too have suffered from this sort of thing, though in my case it is not a little yellow dog, but a funeral that I encounter under like conditions.

I can hardly think of any place that I have been to, where, before even an exploration of strange streets had been completed, a meeting—usually round some sudden corner—was not made with the whole pageant of local funerary proceedings.

And I have never sought these meetings. Only have I learned that round one corner of the unfamiliar streets a funeral will surely come. I know people—and there are many

of them—who regard a funeral as something ranking with a wedding or a christening ; and the respective merits of the three ceremonies as spectacular rites are, I believe, debated by such people. To these the whole affair is something to identify oneself with and to share, something to note and compare with others witnessed, something to be sought out and gazed after.

But with me it has never been thus, I have not sought out strange funerals in strange places—they have come to me with a certainty that I have learned to recognize as inevitable. If I am destined to spend only a few short hours in port I am certain to see the last rites carried out on a leading and respected inhabitant.

I have broken rudely into the wailings of Valetta, the rustic simplicity of funeral in Funchal, and the black oppression of plumes in Rotterdam. I have taken unwillingly part in the ritualistic pageant of Mediterranean ports, the lamentations accompanying the passage of a descendant of the Prophet in Nubia, the cheery simplicity of a Chinese funeral in Singapore, and many others.

In all this I have learned some odds and ends.

Unscientific Essays

And after seeing all of these I have decided that when my end comes let my passing be after the fashion of the Chinese. Let my cronies walk alongside smoking cigarettes and wearing cheerful countenances ; let them hum or chant as suits their vocal powers best, but let the refrain be mundane and cheerful.

I have seen funerals at sea, of my patients some have been buried so, but of all, the Chinese maritime funeral seems best to me.

I remember a torrid Christmas morning when two Chinamen—victims of beriberi—were committed to the deep. I remember the stopping of the engines, the neat packages, the tilted board, the plunge, and the bubbles. I recall the doffed caps of the officers, but above all the cheerful demeanour of the Chinese crew, which alone made Christmas dinner a reality, and the stinginess of the “ old man ” over the customary free port wine an intolerable grievance.

Be he wrapped in canvas with a fire bar at his feet, be he cased in a wicker cage such as commonly holds a pig, or enshrined in a massive tree trunk for a coffin, it has always seemed to me that a Chinese goes most cheerily, most confidently, and yet most casually to the

Great Beyond. May my end be so. May some cheery friend be by to ignite a cracker or so from his cigarette, and to scatter some coloured joss papers to the winds ; and so with tobacco, cheerful dignity, some chanting, and some crackers lay me in my resting place.

At a Chinese funeral one does not lament, nor even feel sad ; and at many other funerals that I have witnessed, lamentation is so far a professional duty that the outsider becomes a mere amateur and an onlooker, and sadness as a personal feeling is lost—absorbed wholly by the skilled demonstration of the few.

But for funerals which bring the sense of absolute bereavement with terrible reality, there are none like those of my island home. We are so few that every one is bereaved, and most are bound by so many ties of blood that the majority are relatives in some sort. Life upon a coral island becomes so intimate that all are mourners, and those that have not lost a relative have lost a friend. But quite apart from that the whole ceremony has always seemed to me to be most solemn. One little island is set aside as the burial-place for all members of the community, and the funeral procession of boats has always struck me as

Unscientific Essays

being far more sadly impressive than even the most elaborately staged and slowest-paced array of black and nodding plumes.

Across the sunlit lagoon where dancing colours play for ever^f in the wonderful blue waters there goes a line of boats filled with the silent mourners, and in the foremost boat of all is that which they follow to its last resting place beneath the pure white coral sand. These are the most solemn of all the funerals that I have seen, and on the island of burial sadness is supreme.

Many of these boat processions have I watched, and all were very sad ; but once into the sadness came a different note, and curiosity became mingled in the sorrow.

Every land and every race has its own last intimate rites in the treatment of the dead ; in my islands it is usual to place little plugs of the fluffy natural island cotton in the ears of the deceased. This seems a reasonable custom. What is less easy to understand is the placing of similar wads between the fingers ; but the detail that arrested my attention on this particular occasion was that in each wad between the fingers a needle was placed. Still more strange seemed the reason for doing this,

Of an Evil Spirit

which was no other than that this was the body of a woman who had died in childbirth.

I think that learned people called ethnologists have observed other queer customs practised in such cases ; and I fancy you will find that all the world over women, dead in such a manner, are regarded in rather a special way. Also it strikes me (as one unlearned in these things) that the more primitive folk rush either to one extreme or the other, for there are some which pay special tender regard to the dead in such a case, and some which treat such a woman as cursed, unclean, and unfitted for the ordinary reverend observances of a funeral.

The truth of it all is that the corpses of these women have special powers which are readily turned to evil purposes. Malay peoples generally try to abate this tendency by special care and special ordnances. Upon the mainland it is customary to place glass beads in the mouth, and a hen's egg in each armpit as well as the needles between the fingers. Caution dictates these observances. The Malays do not cast the body beyond the confines of their villages as an evil thing, but they try to appease the spirit which may so readily become

malignant and to hinder its malignancy if their conciliations should prove unavailing.

What have they to fear from the spirit of such a one ?

That I know quite well, and it is a very real and very dreadful thing : it is nothing less than Pontianak !

The knowledge of Pontianak has spread far beyond Malayan shores. It has frightened mothers in distant lands ; many a woman expecting to be a mother has been benumbed by the thought of her. It has terrified children far from the coral-fringed coasts of Malaya, for the story of Pontianak, like the spirit of herself, flies through the air regardless of time or space. To many races this horrible spirit has made herself known, and as wide as the knowledge of her is, so far spread is the haunting fear of her. And she is wholly to be feared, for there is nothing so dreadful in all the spirit community as Pontianak. Her guise is a very constant one, and no matter how varying her name among the races her physical identity is not to be doubted. She is a spirit woman of entrancing beauty ; no one of the earthly world is quite so bewitchingly beautiful as Pontianak, and for the wealth of her wonderful

Of an Evil Spirit

hair no mortal may match her, for her jet-black tresses fall past her ankles. Her face and form are of the most fatally alluring beauty, but—and it is a horrible but—beneath the flowing mass of hair, as it falls in shining streams behind, is a hideous deformity, nothing less than a ghastly void in her back through which her entrails hang moist and horrible into the open. There is no mistaking the terror should her tresses be wafted by the breeze as she glides past ; but until this terrible revelation is made she is just the most beautiful of all lovely spirit women. Although she is of the spirit world Pontianak is no mere nebulous wraith ; for she has beautiful hands and shining nails to clutch with, and shapely arms with which to embrace, and many men have fallen all unknowing to her lure. It has even been said that one knowing the correct formula may do a charm over her, and that she has become a wife and a mother—until a village dance and some merrymaking has broken the spell and then again she has flown laughing and malignant into the night.

Other mortal characters are said to be hers. She has been declared to be fond of eating fish, and she is most to be dreaded in the

Unscientific Essays

neighbourhood of the fish traps in the grey of very early morning. And again she has to make a link with earthly things in so much as periodically she needs vinegar in which to lave her protruding entrails ; and the presence of the vinegar tub within the house has often led to her undoing. Yet she is a true spirit, and ranks high in the spirit world as a jinn or genic. Like most spirits she can fly, and haunts trees, among the branches of which she sits like some great bird ; she even has her favourite perching places from which she watches for her victims.

Another spirit attribute—for in no way can it be imagined as mortal—is her laugh. Horrid though her protruding viscera may be, this is as nothing compared with her laugh ; for than the laugh of Pontianak there is nothing more fearful in all the world. Chill malignancy, and the blood lust that makes horrible all her doings, are summed up and concentrated in that laugh ; even the whole mockery of her mortal beauty and her ghastly deformity are there ; she laughs, and the blood of her hearers runs cold.

Now the strange doings at the funeral were no haphazard ceremonies ; none of these

Of an Evil Spirit

things are when we come to know enough about them.

The Malay fears the dreadful clutch of the beautiful fingers, and so he places needles in the hands of the potential Pontianak. He dreads the power of flight which may bring the demon silently to his slumbering house, and so he places eggs beneath the arms. But most he would silence the terrible laugh, and lest it should afterwards ring in his ears he places the beads in the mouth to smother it for ever.

And yet at times all these things are unavailing, and despite all care and ceremonial observances, the malignant spirit asserts itself, and a Pontianak issues into the world potent to carry out her horrid quest of sucking the blood of infants. It is for this reason that, when Pontianak is known to be abroad, thorny branches and prickly plants are strewn around the house in which a birth is expected, for Pontianak fears the snaring of her dangling entrails upon the barrier of thorns.

Pontianak is real. Many have seen her. Often the glint of her intestines shining in the moonlight has been caught as she glides by ; and, more than that, she has been found in the morning with her lacerated viscera

Unscientific Essays

entangled among the thorns strewn round the home of the new-born babe whose blood she came to suck by night. I own up at once that I have not seen her, but I do know people who have ; and of her laugh I can tell you more.

It was in the afternoon, just before the sunset, which here falls so early and comes so suddenly that it changes the sunlight of day-time directly into the dusk of night. Towards the veranda of the Chief's house stumbled one of the house boys terrified and tottering. Save for his look of terror no more was to be learned from him, for his lips could frame no words ; and since he was known as a peculiar and abnormal creature no very great importance was attached to his condition. But after him came staggering a buxom native girl, but she, too, was terrified out of her senses, and sinking in a heap upon the veranda floor she clearly indicated that some horrible experience had happened to them.

Next from the garden came the Chief's dog, a broken-coated fox terrier, born and bred in England, and he was bristling and quivering in all his body, ever with his head half-turned over his shoulder to give a terrified snarl at

Of an Evil Spirit

something he expected to follow. Then striding slowly, and with much determination not to be hurried, came the Chief himself. Clearly, though he walked with great deliberation, something was [•]wrong even with him, and his long knife was unsheathed and held carefully at the guard in his right hand. He walked firmly—too firmly—up the veranda steps, and, English-like, made for the table and the soda water, remarking with a manner intended for masterful finality, “My stomach is out of order, I have been hearing strange noises.”

Round all that garden runs a high brick wall, and guards are always at its gates ; yet though the Chief had only heard “strange noises,” he at once turned out the men to search the garden, in which no human being was found.

They all had heard it—the awful laugh.

The servants had fled at once. The dog had braved it a little longer. The Chief had taken out his knife and strode towards the sound, but the laugh, first before him, had next come from his side, over his shoulder, and behind him, and turn this way or that he could never come to it. Before, beside, or behind him the terrible mocking laugh was

always near. Centring ever round a tamarind tree, yet always close to his ear, the dreaded laugh of Pontianak flitted, and turn about as he might it was too quick for him to face the place whence it came. ‘No living being was there, it was no use to strike the air with his blade, and—well, there could be no doubt that his stomach *was* out of order, and so he strode the path to the house with the laugh now over one shoulder, now over the other.

That tamarind tree I know particularly well. Often have I been beneath it, but no matter how familiar mere man might grow with it, the broken-coated terrier would never come into its neighbourhood without a ruffling of his hackles, a stiffening of his limbs, and an angry snarl—and he was born and bred in England, mind you.

Of Memory

OUR memories play us foolish tricks at times. One cannot remember a man's face—another cannot recall his name. We remember certain things we did when we were still quite young children, and yet we cannot tell where we put the key we had in our hands no longer ago than yesterday.

People forget all sorts of things. They even forget who they are, and lose all sense of their own identity. It may happen that a person starts out of a morning to do the daily round; to perform the same tasks as have been done in the same fashion, maybe, for years. But the tedious routine grows unfamiliar, the customary task proves strange; and before the day is done such a one may have forgotten who he is, and have no idea what may be his name, his station, or his dwelling-place. In such cases we say that folk are suffering from a loss of memory. They are also suffering

Unscientific Essays

from a loss of individuality. Are, then, memory and individuality in any way akin? If we forget what we are do we cease to be what we were? It would certainly seem so.

If, for awhile, we forget who we are, and assume that we are some other character, shall we indeed be that other character? It is well known that people may go to sleep in one individuality and awake in another; these are the cases of dual personality. To anyone it might happen that chancing to fall asleep a Dr. Jekyll he might awake a Mr. Hyde.

It is bad enough to forget who we are; it is a disaster to suppose we are somebody worse.

But we are liable to these upsets simply because our memory, and our individuality, have forced themselves to the level of our consciousness. If our memory, and our individuality, were subconscious, we may suppose that their association, and their progress, would be less liable to disturbance.

Large and slowly growing trees are living entities of a very great age. In the scale of longevity a tree may make a man appear no better than a May-fly. Yet in all its long life period it has remained the same tree. As a

Of Memory

seedling its individuality was the same as that which characterized it when a sapling ; and the sapling has handed on the same characteristics to maturity and to old age. There is a continuity of individuality which runs through the whole life of the tree. To the mechanically minded it may be easier to picture the continuity of individuality as depending on some concrete material factor in the composition of some part of the tree. Nevertheless, it may be far nearer to the truth to extend our human experience to the tree, and imagine the continuity to be related to a memory which dwells in living matter. Wholly unmechanical, and all unconscious ; not to be expressed in terms of force or form, is a great factor of life, most nearly represented as an expression by what we can only realize as a continuity of memory.

The continuity of memory runs through the life of the tree, and one day it becomes extended to a tiny portion that will find its expansion as a flower, and ultimately as a seed. At first a part of the living tree, the seed becomes a separated entity, but still within it is contained its continuity of memory. Nor can it lose this so long as life remains in it.

The seed may be kept for years, it may be

Unscientific Essays

carried to some part of the world altogether different from that in which it lived when it formed part of the tree. But still this extraordinary quality persists. We may say, speaking feebly, that the seed never loses its memory, never forgets who and what it is. Nothing can confuse it. It is as a school child who has thoroughly learned and remembered its lesson, and if started at the beginning it will go through the whole performance without hesitation, and without mistake.

Plant it and it will grow ; it will remember what sort of leaves it should unfold, what type of bark it ought to make and, when the time comes, it will remember what flowers and what scents it must produce, and what seeds must be begot within the flowers. "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance." And that is very true indeed.

Of the Sea-Serpent

I HAVE a confession to make, for I have it on my mind that I have done a very horrid thing. I am in doubt that I have committed the unpardonable sin, a sin than which there can be none more loathly—I believe that I have killed the sea-serpent, and that, too, ere he was fully grown. I will make you a full confession of it, and maybe it will ease the conscience that has to bear the weight of the accumulated doubt, and certainly of guilt.

It was not the only time that I had seen the sea-serpent. Once in the Banka Straits, in the days when I went to my islands, I leant upon the rail in company with another, who was shortly to be marooned, and the sea-serpent showed himself to us ; knowing, I suppose, that we were about to leave the haunts of man, and could not tell his reality ; trusting, I expect, to the sobering effects of isolation, which have

till now forbade me abusing his confidence. I saw my companion with his eyes fixed upon it. I expected him to say, "Whatever is that?" and I thought that he only deserved the reply, "It is very long, it goes very fast; it is very big, and very much alive; but I don't know what it is." I fondly imagined that it would teach him caution, but presently, after we had followed it with fascinated eyes, came the inevitable, "Do you think it might be the sea——?" "I told you I don't know what it is," and soon by good luck it was gone from sight. Beyond the exchange of a handshake, expressive of much trust and deep understanding, we showed the mocking world no sign.

Now that is true as I have told it, and to this day I do not know what that long live thing may have been. The Banka Straits would prove an ideal home for such as he: it is a place of swirls and eddies of mysterious water, where for a space the sea is smooth as glass, and for a space is tossed with white horses; where streaks like oil stretch through the waves as high-roads plain to see: a place of floating wrack, of slowly moving sea-snakes, of things that come quickly and as quickly go,

Of the Sea-Serpent

and a place where dwells something very long, and very quickly moving.

Now to-day, after I have so long withstood the temptation of unveiling him, I come a-writing of him ; and to-day I must unburden my conscience, for I believe that I have on my hands the blood of one of his children. That is my confession and the reason for laying bare my sins to you.

This time he came up out of thirteen hundred fathoms of dark blue water ; came slowly to the surface sorely maimed, that once before he died he might show himself to doubting man. His home was in that deep trough of Indian Ocean that washes Sumbawa's southern shores ; and twenty miles from land we were lying at the time of his visit. I left my fishing, where I tried with every art I knew to make a very large and very lazy shark take into his mouth many pounds of iron shaped hook-wise, and but ill-disguised by the presence of a dead duck and some bacon. I left the shark to himself and went to the bows of the ship, where the crowd of natives were watching the thing in all the wonder of its long body and gay colours. He had just come up out of the great deepness of those

indigo transparencies, and he lay in the water, just keeping pace with the current that ran past our overhanging bows. The Malays stared at him, the Chinese gaped, and in truth he was a sight to make the breath come in gasps. A long silvery body, the one side reflecting the blue of deep ocean, the other the royal-mail red of the ship's boot-topping ; a graceful ripple of the dorsal fin, crimson and delicate ; and now and again the projection high above the water of the waving scarlet crest. Such was a first sight impression of him. Strange and beautiful he looked as I stared at him from above, something that man ought not to see, something to be spoken of only in hushed voices, something it were wrong to meddle with. And yet so little reverence has man for Nature's mysteries, that the next thing is the running for hooks and bait, and the vowing that by some means or other we must have him, must get him aboard and examine him. Some one looks for the harpoons, and cannot find them ; another makes a running bowline to snare him with ; I tempt him with a baited hook, which he ignores, and try to foul hook him with a bunch of shark hooks, which he does not heed. His only response

Of the Sea-Serpent

to our best efforts is the slow elevation of the lovely scarlet crest, and its equally slow depression. For ever the ripple of scarlet shimmers down his length, and the blue and silver play alternate on his sides; for ever his mouth opens and shuts with a steady rhythmic movement, as he keeps his long body poised in the water. For ever the strange scarlet crest goes slowly up and down, rising and quivering against the current, standing in its full dignity of two or three feet above the water, and then slowly sinking back again.

For many crowded minutes he displays himself suspended in the clear water, and then, turning slowly on his side, shows the whole wealth of his silvery splendour, looks at us with a great sad eye, twists supple round our bows, and slowly sinks. We watch him as he goes, his silver turned to blue, the blue to indigo, his scarlet plume and crest lost in the very deepness of the transparent water. Only a quiver of pink light or a dazzle of silver shoots sideways as now and again he slowly turns his body as he sinks. One thing we see as he fades sadly from our sight, and it gives the clue to the whole pathos of the scene—he has no tail. Somehow or other he has

Unscientific Essays

been cut off short. A shark or some other monster has shorn him of his strength, and instead of tantalizing us by swiftly skimming along the surface of the water, as is his wont, he has come, feeling death to be near, to give man the best view that he has ever had of one of his race.

Slowly we realized it all, we had seen the last of him. He had sunk to his cold and silent grave upon the ooze, beneath all those thirteen hundred fathoms of blue water, fearful lest man should find his remains and make a boast of them. We have had our last look at the sea-serpent, and now we can only talk of him—but at least we can talk, now that he has gone, without lowering our voices to a whisper. We are certain that none have seen so clearly his like before, are sure that he was every inch of twelve feet long, that the crest and plumes were something to be wondered at, and that the expression of his eye was very, very sad.

Somehow there is something that is strangely familiar in all this. The crested head that appeared above the waves, the mane that marked the rising neck, and above all the great pathetic eye ; we knew them all. Never a sailor's

Of the Sea-Serpent

story of the sea-serpent, but the crest, the mane, and the great sad eye were there—we had simply joined the ranks of those who are branded with the brand of Ananias,—those who go down to the sea in ships and see that great leviathan.

Well, he was gone, and it were wiser to forget him, to pretend that he had never been ; and I believe each one of us resolved that nothing would ever make him tell the tale to those who spend their lives at ease. Now this, by every tradition of the sea, should be the end of a sea-serpent story ; all hands had seen him, his most inconsiderable details had been noted ; he had come with dignity, and with dignity he had gone. But of my story this is not the end, for I have yet my confession to make.

Sadly I turned away from the bows to continue luring the sharks that seemed so commonplace and vulgar by comparison. But the sport had grown tame : the brown and blunt-nosed things would circle round the hook, eager for the bacon, dreading the barb, and even were they hooked, where was the scarlet plume, where the silver sheen, and what in those horrid grey eyes could compare with the great pathetic ones that had so lately looked

up at me? Curiosity, and the backwardness of the sharks, soon had me back a-gazing into the blue depths in which I had seen the scarlet crest go down, and even as I gazed, a glint of silver suddenly caught told me that he was still near at hand. The silver flashed again, and then a sidelong pink ripple, and there was no doubt that he was coming up again.

A boat is lowered and manned, and it stands by in readiness, hidden under the port side of the ship; the long silver body comes nearer to the surface, and I take my stand at the bows, with a double-barrel loaded with number fours. Now some moments of suspense as he stays poised uncertain whether to rise or sink, and then up he comes, slowly and with infinite dignity. It is clear to us all the reason for his return, for now he is displaying two long and gaudy streamers that grow from below his front fins. When first he came these were pressed in close to his sides, and we had had no chance to see them, and it was the doubt that we had not seen all his beauty, when he sang his swan song to us, that had brought him back again. He turns on his side that we may see them float free of his silvery body, and his head comes

to the surface. The contents of the left barrel goes in between his eyes, but the right barrel, alas, shatters his wonderful crest. With the report the boat starts off, but it is a long while before the Malays can make the bows, and then the long body is drifting fast astern a-down the starboard side, sinking, sinking, ever sinking as it goes. Round the bows in a great curve sweeps the boat, and all hands run aft along the deck, shouting to the boatmen as a flash of silver reveals the sinking body. By the time they are up to him he has nearly gone astern, and he is in the water deep below them. Then the unexpected thing happens, for he starts to rise again directly alongside the boat ; a boat-hook helps him on, and with four pairs of arms around his silver girth he is hoisted inboard.

The sharks that have been dallying around my hook astern, realize that they have missed a victim, and all too late come upon the scene, with no more to be done than to follow the boat back to the ship. Now he is ours to do with as we will, we hoist him on deck and examine him, and find that though in truth we have got the sea-serpent, we have not got nearly all of him, for a great portion of his

length must be a-missing. We measure him, and, mutilated as he is, he is only three inches short of twelve feet long. His crest is gone, but one scarlet streamer remains intact, and the crimson fin that runs the whole length of his back is there to see and wonder at.

He was ours to cut up and examine, and he was duly cut up and examined. Rude hands rubbed off, in sheer delight, the silver from his sides, and toyed with the strange mouth that was innocent of teeth. Rude hands carved him up to make shark bait, and the flesh was pink like that of salmon, but no man ate of it. It was to me a sign of his romantic origin, that no part of him, save his scarlet fin, would stand the wear and tear of human usage. Lest profane man would make a boast of his remains, should make a show of his carcass, he is composed of a substance entirely perishable ; and his great body dissolved in sunshine as a dream will melt in waking. Save a sticky pinkish water, and a shine of silver, there is nothing of the sea-serpent that a man may keep for his reputation's sake ; and who will believe that a man has slain the sea-serpent because he may treasure some sticky fluid and a little silver ?

Of the Sea-Serpent

Now time alone has made me tell you this story, for I could no longer bear to keep to myself the secret of my crime. This is all true, that I slew the sea-serpent when he was not full grown, and when he was sorely maimed ; and of all things that I have ever seen he was most like those made-up monsters that the Chinese love to carry in their New Year processions,—even his silver was not stuck on tight, it could all be rubbed off, and his black spots looked unreal.

You may say that if this is true, why do I write of it thus, and why have I not told of it before. My excuse is that it is only my wish to confess that has made me break my silence now, and who would dare to tell with more authoritative note that he had killed a sea-serpent ere it was fully grown? No one might tell the world with serious intent that he had even seen him, no one would risk the infamy that would surely be his, did he say that he had fingered him, had rubbed off his silver, and opened his stomach to see upon what he fed.

I have handled the sea-serpent with familiarity, as the child, when picking up the shooting star, toyed with it till it was spoiled by the

wearing away of its silver points ; but the doing of it can bring no kudos to me. I would sooner say that I had not seen it than have the world suspect that I had thrown in my lot with the sailor-man. Only when I am asked what is the scarlet streamer which decorates my wall do I venture to own up ; and then only if the questioner sits late into the night with me.

VII

Of Inheritance

WE inherit of our mental, moral and physical compositions whatever our mother and father have to give us. More than this, we may inherit whatever in the way of mental, moral and physical characters our race, as represented by our whole family tree, has to give us.

It seems unnecessary to add that what our race and our parents have not to give us—that we cannot inherit.

There are many large volumes written on heredity, but none of them contain any more than is expressed in these three sentences ; and these three sentences express, in reality, three great truths. It is only when we inquire what had our race and our parents to give us that the difficulty begins. Strangely enough the difficulty is largely removed if we always bear in mind our third and apparently silly

sentence—that they cannot give us that which they have not to give.

Whatever an individual pair of creatures has to pass on to an individual offspring must be a part of the general make-up of the parents at the time of the begetting of the offspring. That is obvious. Nothing that happens to the parents after the begetting of the offspring can enter into the heredity of the offspring.

Now, if we agree that the parents can hand on only that which they have at the time when their offspring is begot, it becomes a comparatively simple matter to agree as to what the race can hand on to the individual. The race can only hand on what was in its make-up at the time of the average period of reproduction of the race. That and no more.

Suppose heredity consisted in the handing on of the effects of accumulated experiences. Then a pair of individuals could hand on the effects of the accumulated experiences that had accrued in their lives until the time at which they begot their offspring. In the same way, the accumulated experience of the race which can be handed on is the accumulated experience of the race up to the average time of the onset of the period of reproduction. This and

Of Inheritance

this only can be inherited by the offspring.

There are a hundred queer reflections that must arise from this conclusion. It is obvious that an animal type, which in all its racial story had reproduced when comparatively old, must have far more to hand on to its offspring than an animal which had the habit of reproducing at a very early age. In our own case we might say that the later marriage was postponed in the whole mass of humanity the more in the way of heredity there would be to pass on to the children. Again, we see at once that the first-born, having less of accumulated experience to inherit, is justly compensated by inheriting accumulated wealth, and what the last-born lacks in worldly goods he makes up for in his rich inheritance of the effects of experience. But another, and a far more important, problem faces us as a result of our conclusion. If we can only inherit the accumulated experience of our race (or inherit "heredity") up to the average time of reproduction of our species,—after that time we must live without hereditary experience. There must be two periods in our lives. There must be a time when we are living on hereditary experience, when we are simply epitomizing the

history of our race ; and there must come a time when this legacy is exhausted, when we lose the prop of our heritage and face the world as individuals.

Now this is rather an alarming thought, for it means nothing short of the conclusion that we only become ourselves as individuals when a considerable part of our lives has already passed away.

But, though this dictum may not be very plainly expressed in works upon heredity, we all know it to be true. We have all experienced the truth of it, and if only it were labelled as scientific we should believe in it. There has come a time in the lives of every one of us when we have found ourselves, when we have come to a realization of our powers and our limitations—when for the first time we knew who we were, what we were, and what we were capable of. And for every one this realization has not been the same.

It is possible that the individual may be composed of a clay that is inferior to that of the average of his race. Nevertheless, during his years of inherited life he will be propped up by the buttress of his accumulated racial inheritance. But there will come a time when

Of Inheritance

this prop is taken away. He will outlive his inherited experience. He will come out in his true colours as himself—as a product inferior to the standard of his race. He will belie the promise of his school days, and sink into his proper sphere as an inferior individual. Or the reverse may be true. Then the boy who was dull at school, and of whom his school-masters had little good to report, begins to make amends, and in the end becomes an individual better than the average of his stock.

But no matter what may be the relation of the quality of the individual to the quality of his stock, the period of adolescence is necessarily a time of readjustment. The adolescent is a person at an awkward age—a butterfly of individuality struggling to emerge from a chrysalis of inherited mediocrity ; the adolescent is not necessarily a person struggling with the dawn of sex. Huxley said : “ I doubt whether even the keenest judge of character, if he had before him a hundred boys and girls under fourteen, could pick out, with the least chance of success, those who should be kept, as certain to be serviceable members of the polity, and those who should be chloroformed, as equally sure to be stupid,

idle, or vicious." In saying this Huxley did not come to his conclusion by the same steps as those by which we have arrived at agreement with him. Far from it. But, nevertheless, he spoke the truth.

VIII

Of the Crab's Secret

THERE is such a thing as the Sunday morning feeling—the knowing when you wake that to-day is Sunday. Sometimes the feeling comes at waking, sometimes after you have waked to the belief that the coming day is as other working days ; and then it is at its best. Than the waking with a Monday morning feeling, and finding the day to be Sunday, nothing can be better.

This morning I felt that it was Sunday when I first opened my eyes, but my calendar said Friday.

With Friday pulled from the little pack of paper days, Saturday suited no better, so Sunday the day must be, and Sunday it actually is. My calendar, too, says that it is Septuagesima Sunday, and that it is high water at London Bridge at 9.30—perhaps that is why I was so sure it was Sunday.

Why should the almanac always tell you

when it is high water at London Bridge? I suppose that some folk must always awake athirst for the knowledge of when that high water will be, or the men who make almanacs would cease to tell of it ; but the tides of the Thames seem to me to be silly things in which to instruct daily the average householder. Yet what strange things the tides are, and how little do we ever think of their mystery. It is the outcome, and one of the very worst outcomes, of what we call education, that we, when young, easily accept reasons easily given for the explanation of the greatest of Nature's secrets. We are given a name, say, "gravity," "heredity," or the hundred and one others of their kind, and these names are our explanation and our solace : we know the name, and, to an unthinking world the word is coined and paid, and accepted as good currency whenever facts need explanation. If in the days when we are taught—days quite apart, as a rule, from the days in which we learn—we are apt with our word, we will reply to a question by giving the countersign ; we will produce our talisman, and be accepted as one learned in the greatest of Nature's handiworks ; and for the world, the power of the talisman lasts

long after those days. The man who, with every appearance of wisdom, gives "gravity," or "heredity," or what-not as his explanation for some happening, passes to an unthinking majority as a person of great erudition ; but the man whom he would call a savage knows more of the reality of many of the doings of Nature, though he may not know the counter-sign.

When we were younger we knew well that the tides were caused by the "attraction of the sun and moon, principally the latter," and we thought, for those that taught us took our answer as finality, that we knew all. To-day I know no more ; and to-day I will say with pride that to me the talisman means nothing, when before it meant all. Still, I think that much of the problem of the tides may be solved if we go the right way to work.

We shall have to go right back to the beginning, for that is the way to find out about anything. Now in the very beginning, "in the days when Haze bore Darkness, and Darkness Haze, when The Lord of the Outer Silence Himself was yet in the Womb of Creation, before the existence of the names of Earth and Heaven, of God and Mohammed,

of the Empyrean and Crystalline spheres, or of Space and Void, the Creator of the entire Universe pre-existed by Himself, and He was the Eldest Magician. He created the Earth of the width of a tray, and the Heavens of the width of an umbrella, which are the Universe of the Magician."

You may say that this does not seem to be any more clear than anything you knew before, and I agree with you, but I will remind you that any explanation of the beginning of all things is not easy reading, and that if this tells you no more, it tells you no less, than other stories of its kind. To account for the origin of the Universe of the Magician is a more difficult task than to solve the mystery of tides ; and even we, though we may handle such words as Cosmos and Chaos never so deftly, have as yet, thank Heaven, no talisman for that.

In the universe thus made was the dry land and the water, and the water was gathered together into the Great Ocean. In the middle of the Great Ocean is an island, the island of the Pauh Jangi—which is a great tree. Beneath the island is the vast cavern of the Pusat Tasek—or navel of the sea, and in the cavern dwells a gigantic crab.

Of the Crab's Secret

Twice in the day the crab goes forth in search of food, and as he leaves his hole the waters rush in to fill it, and the tide must ebb : on his return he drives the sea out from his cavern, and the flow follows. .

That is the true explanation, and I accept it, for it is simple and is capable of receiving much support.

Is not the fruit of the Pauh Jangi washed ashore on Malayan beaches, and has it not even found its way into Europe, and into history ? It was for this very nut that the Emperor Rudulf II offered in vain four thousand florins to the family of Wolfert Hermanszen, the Dutch admiral.

The admiral had been at the relief of Bantam when it was attacked by the Portuguese in 1602, and the King of Bantam had given him his best—the fruit of the tree that no man had ever seen and lived to tell of. That is true, and I for one much prefer to think that the nut came from the Pauh Jangi, than to be told that it grows in the Seychelles on a palm.

And the crab : every one knows that the crabs go out to feed twice in the day. I have watched them do it time and again ; and twice in the day, when the tide is low, the whole

Unscientific Essays

army of crabs is out on the rocks hunting and being hunted.

When the great crab of the tides is astir all the lesser ones feel his call and all share his instincts, and, beating with his pulse beat, get up to seek their food when he turns out to feed.

I have nothing to tell me daily that the sun and moon, "principally the latter," might cause the tides, but the crabs remind me every day that they are just the sort of folk to do it.

I can imagine crabs capable of almost anything, and so I think that the Malay has wisely chosen his tide maker, and I accept him.

If any animals have in their keeping some deep secret, it is the crabs. Sometimes folk have been tempted to suppose that the monkeys held the key of knowledge, and that the wise old-faced creatures could tell us, did they wish, things that would make all clear, but might not be good for us.

Still, it is not likely, for none of the chattering people could keep a secret, and even if the little lemurs knew of it they would surely go to sleep again before they could tell us all.

But watch the big Kapiting crab as he very slowly sidles from his hole ; he keeps his

Of the Crab's Secret

eyes straight on their stalks, and sees everything and knows everything he sees ; soon another, limb by limb and eye by eye, slowly comes up beside him, and with eyes cocked at each other, one limb moving at a time, they make for their evening meeting. But they go slowly, for they are taking stock of everything, and in ten minutes, when they have gone some six inches towards friendship, they are certain that you are a man and an enemy ; the backward march is begun, and this time the eyes are cocked at you, and one great claw is carried raised in front, as a boxer careful of his guard. These crabs were going abroad in the twilight with this great stealth, because they were going to talk of things of which we do not know. Likely they were going to ask and tell of their King, the Tide Maker. Likely, had they not known so soon and so surely that man was near, they would have told the Great Secret itself.

I believe that we often make bad judgments of the intelligence of animals—just as we do our fellow men—because in different creatures intelligence wears so many different guises, and we are apt to be deceived by the beasts that make parade of their accomplishments.

There are many animals that, with little wisdom, but with much address, pass as clever fellows ; but the crab is not among them, for no man can truly say that he has ever caught a crab showing off for his benefit. The crab uses all his great cleverness in pretending that he is a humble, stupid creature, and he would far sooner live all his life down a hole that was deep and dark, than do one trick in daylight that man might think him clever. The crab is so very wise that he keeps his wisdom secret : I know one small crab of my island shore that can catch flies with his pinchers, but he does not know that I ever caught him at it, for rather than have that trick made public he would pretend all his life that he could only crawl sideways, and slowly search for sea wrack. The most profoundly wise of all the crabs are those that live on land, and there are many and varied land crabs amongst my fellow islanders—and the chief of them all is the great *Udang darat*. The *Udang darat* is shaped like a lobster, and is a gay fellow, for he is a fine blue, and has red facings to his blue as well ; when he is old he is very big, and at any age he is very clever.

So clever is he, and so far superior to man's

Of the Crab's Secret

little schemes, that short of keeping him locked up in a safe or preserved in spirit, there is practically no way of having him captive ; for so much does he suspect that man will learn his wisdom and search him for his secret, that rather than be watched, he will with infinite pains escape from any home you can contrive for him.

He of all his kind has grown most independent of the sea, and were it not that he has as companions many other crabs that make the links of sea and land he might have forgotten all about the tides and the secret of their origin.

Some of his relations live in the sea, some half in and half out, and some on land, and all are much given to undemonstrative clanship and to learned discussion, and so the secrets of the tides are preserved and handed on.

If you take a walk round the island in the early morning you will often see a dozen or so dilapidated sea shells, arranged in a little circle ; the shells are different of size and shape, but from each one project some bright red legs ; these belong to the red hermit crabs. Now for long it puzzled me to think what those hermit crabs could be doing there on the beach. I looked on the hermit crab

Unscientific Essays

as the most unsociable of creatures, and yet here would be ten or twenty all with their heads together, all met for something, and it was only slowly that the reason of their doings dawned upon me.

If you sit on the trunk of a fallen coco palm, and quietly watch them, you will see that slowly—very slowly—they walk away, and as they go you notice the quaint little track that they leave behind them.

As each crab moves along a broad flat furrow is left upon the sand, and on either side of the furrow deep punctures dot the route: the trailing shell and the straight sharp legs of the slowly moving hermit print this pattern.

The next thing that strikes you is that the sand all round these moving shells is wonderfully scored and furrowed with crab prints, and as you start to follow some of them it strikes you more and more. Hundreds of tracks lead away from the spot in all directions, some to the sea—and you follow them in vain; some like those that the red legs are making now, and at their end you find other hermits, and those that are farthest from the circle are the blue ones with the big round claw. Some tracks are large, and have no furrow, and these

Of the Crab's Secret

you lose in the undergrowth at the top of the beach ; some are tiny, and lead towards the mud flats ; but unless you are lucky enough to track a purple land crab or a yellow one beneath a boulder, you will never find the writers of the other signatures.

But when you have a proper appreciation for the crab, and his secret, and his wisdom, the mystery of that track-furrowed sand is easily solved.

Last night—and there was no moon—a great meeting was held, and it took place on the sandy beach, so that the crabs from the sea and the crabs from the land could all come ; as morning light appeared, the whole company of them broke up and went their ways, for man pries by daylight. The slowest of all the crabs is the red hermit, and daybreak found him still astray, and his cousin with the blue legs, who moves but little faster, had still some way to go ; but all the others were away long since, and you would never even guess, if you went to the Kapitings' holes towards which the tracks lead, that they, too, were abroad last night discussing the Great Secret.

I know very well what was done last night

upon the beach, and I can pretty well tell you who was there.

There was, of course, the big blue Udang, and he was probably the president ; there were Kapitings with their great claws, and I think that they were as wise as any, and sat on the outside of the ring, so that they could see over the heads of the smaller kinds, and they were only appealed to when the rest were in doubt.

There were the smaller purple land crabs and the yellow ones, and among the most talkative were the grey-green fellows who run so fast sideways along the firm sand, and whose eyes stick up so far ; they sat down two by two, and they had to arrange themselves very carefully, for some had the right claw big and some the left, and they are so big and sharp that if they do not stow them well they get in their neighbour's way. From their holes down in the flats come the little fiddlers : there were lots of them, all like little men playing double basses, and as they sat behind their one great pink claw no one could see their tiny green bodies, or tell if they were awake or asleep, and it did not matter much, for the fiddler lives in the mud and is not so clever as some crabs.

Of the Crab's Secret

Up from the sea came the Tralek, the flat and striped crabs that run on the rocks ; and crabs with red legs and crabs with pink bodies, with red backs and yellow backs, and all colours up to black and white. There were crabs with crosses and spots, with stripes and streaks, some shining and polished, some dull and covered with seaweeds, but all of them keepers of the Great Secret, and very wise.

And the hermits came too, and they started early in the afternoon and only just got there in time, and they did not say much out loud, but just talked together two and two.

What they said I do not know, except that it all had to do with the Great Secret, and was told with much tilting of the eye and solemnity ; but I am going to sit up late on the beach next time there is no moon, and if I can find the red-legged hermit starting off I shall follow him very slowly, and one day I will learn the Great Secret.

IX

Of Barking

I IMAGINE that I am in no danger of coming into conflict with learned zoologists, or still more learned psychologists, when I assert that only two considerations affect the mentality of the ass when it brays. It may put a wealth of expression into the performance, its efforts may absorb its whole activities ; but nevertheless two, and only two, considerations concern it. It is concerned firstly with the effect that the bray produces upon its own mentality ; and secondly it is concerned with the effect that the bray produces upon the mentality of other asses.

Birds may be frightened by the noise, other beasts may pause to listen, or may flee at the first note, but for none of these things the ass cares. A human auditor may be affected in various ways ; he may think the sound annoying, amusing, or even pleasing as his fancy and his temperament dictate. But what effect

Of Barking

the bray may have on man is no concern of the ass. The noise is not made for man's benefit, and the manner in which he happens to regard it does not sway the ass in that moment when it decides to bray or be silent. Indeed, I doubt if any man has been deliberately wished a "Good morning" by the braying of his favourite ass.

But with the dog the case is very different. When a dog barks there is no such simple deduction to be made as when an ass brays. The dog may be concerned only with the effect of his bark upon another dog—he may be sending a challenge to the dog next door. Or the bark may not be intended to interest any other dog—it may be produced solely for its effect upon some human being. There is no end to the stories of the wisdom of dogs ; but in essence their wisdom lies always in the fact that some doing of theirs has relation, not so much to another of their kind, as to some human being. A dog's barking is, I imagine, a thing very different from the braying of an ass. An ass is concerned only with the effect of its braying upon another ass ; but a dog is concerned with more than mere dogs when it barks.

Now it is to be noted that the bark of a dog is something added to the dog. It is his birthright only in so far as he is indeed the friend of man. The wild wolf and the wild dingo have never learned to bark : their lot it is to howl, and the howl is made by wolf for wolf, or by dingo for dingo : it is not made for man.

There is something very mysterious in this barking of dogs, something that makes one pause and, for a moment, be dissatisfied with the cold phraseology of the mere statement that it is a habit acquired or developed by domestication. It is in truth a power of expression practised for a psychological association, and an ethical relation, which the domestic dog knows, but which his wild progenitor is completely ignorant of.

Suppose we turn the clock of human affairs back for near a century, and examine mankind as it strutted and posed, paraded and passed in the pages of, say, an old diary. In many ways these people are strangers to us, and in most of their doings they are tedious. On the whole we regard them as somewhat our inferiors, since they did not know the times we know, or do the things we do. And yet,

Of Barking

when we examine their writings or read their speeches, we notice the presence of something, of some quality hard to define, but one we do not find in the writings or the speeches of to-day. What we notice is not a defect—it is a presence ; the defect is with us now. There was an atmosphere which is gone. Can it be that we to-day think and write and speak only with regard to other beings exactly like ourselves, while our forefathers had some other concern in framing their thoughts and their utterances ? Is it possible that modern commonplace speech and writing is like the howl of the dingo, made only with regard to other dingos, and we have forgotten how to express ourselves with regard to anything other than our own immediate kind ?

In truth, I believe that man has forgotten how to bark,—but he can howl with much emphasis.

Of Wer-Tigers

ALL clever people know that every varied phase of Nature, every trick and turn of place and time, has its own children. Many clever people possess, for the enlightening of others not so clever as themselves, a wonderful stock-in-trade of words such as "environment," "variation," "selection," and "evolution," which sound so well that all that these convenient words connote they regard as being, for them, an open book.

Now, clever people are not always so wise as they think, and the invention of endless names, names that trick the mind, but crude things none the less, will never solve mysterious happenings so subtle and mystic as are Nature's secrets.

If Nature's own children baffle clever man in the ordered fitness of their habitat, it cannot be expected that the geographical distribution of the species of the spirit-world would

Of Wer-Tigers

be a well-worn subject. And yet I know that as the tern's egg matches the shingled beach, and as the tree-snakes match the green leaves, so do those others—the "little folk"—match the glades of English woods ; so does the loup garou match the snowlands of the North, and the rimau hantu or wer-tiger fit the mysterious surroundings of the Malayan jungle.

There are many ghosts, real spirit creatures, dwellers on this earth and yet not of it, that have an existence as real in the minds of Malayan people as is that of the Sun and Moon in ours. As you or I would regard the man who would say to us " You are mistaken : there is really no such thing as the Sun or Moon," so these people regard the Western scoffer who would tell them that their wer-tigers were not realities.

The Malay is not an ignorant savage, he is often a cultured, always a natural, gentleman ; and it is perhaps fitting that we should approach his beliefs, bereft of some of our assumed superiority, bereft of our unimaginative, unsympathetic Western mental attitude.

It would not always be well that we should laugh at the homely " little folk " of our home-

land, for often they are more than half-believed in by a race than which perhaps no other is more out of real touch with Nature. What does our countryman know of field life as a rule? What does the field labourer, the man who lives his life with Nature's secrets, know of the beasts and birds around him? Rare would be the English farm hand who would know a tithe of the Nature-lore of the Malay, and hard to meet the man whose knowledge of the habits of beasts, and whose real sympathy with Nature rivalled that possessed by these truest of students, and most accurate of observers. It may not, then, be seemly for the race that let Richard Jefferies die in pain and poverty to point the finger of scorn at the beliefs—the knowledge—of a race of men, every one of whom is his potential prototype.

Now the wer-tigers, which are almost exact parallels to the wer-wolves, have a human shape and an animal shape.

The man passes amongst his fellows, a man among men; but he also wanders in the jungle a fearsome beast alert to slay and devour those who in his other being are his kin. This power of becoming a rimau hantu is possessed more especially by the men of

Of Wer-Tigers

Korinchi, in Sumatra ; this tribe furnishes the most terrible of wer-tigers, but ghost-tigers—the tiger forms of dead men—are of wider distribution.

That the Korinchi men at times become tigers the Malays *know*. “Evidence, if it be needed, may be had in plenty ; the evidence too of sober-minded men, whose words in a Court of Justice would bring conviction to the mind of the most obstinate of jurymen, and be more than sufficient to hang the most innocent of prisoners. The Malays know well how Haji Abdallah, the native of the little State of Korinchi, in Sumatra, was caught in a tiger trap, and thereafter purchased his liberty at the price of the buffaloes he had slain while he marauded in the likeness of a beast. They know of countless Korinchi men who have vomited feathers after feasting upon fowls, when for the nonce they had assumed the form of tigers ; and of those other men of the same race who have left their garments and their trading packs in thickets whence presently a tiger has emerged. All these things the Malays know have happened, and are happening to-day, in the land in which they live, and with these plain evidences before

Unscientific Essays

their eyes, the empty assurances of the enlightened European that wer-tigers do not, and never did, exist, excite derision not unmingled with contempt." So wrote Hugh Clifford.

That these supernatural creatures exist a naturally observant people have no doubt ; they live in their midst, they may be their honoured guests by day and the devourers of their live-stock by night. These creatures even carry into their abnormal state some remnants of their human peculiarities ; for have not the Malays of Jugra told how a tiger was killed in a trap and was found to have some teeth plated with gold. And then how the malevolent old fellow, whose teeth bore the same plating, and who was really killed in his tiger phase, was never more seen by any man. But the wer-tiger is not accepted by the Korinchi people themselves—it is not their boast, no source of power or superiority for them, for they deny the gift of transformation with which their neighbours credit them. It is really the Chenaku people, so they say, who possess these powers. And yet Sir Frank Swettenham has told of four Korinchi men coming to a district of Perak and sad

Of Wer-Tigers

havoc at once was wrought among the livestock of the natives. Then the strangers moved on, and not long after three only returned to beg the head-man of the village that he would send out men to bury the body of a tiger that had just been killed. It would seem that, at least, the Korinchi men had a more than ordinary compassion for a dead tiger, and it was certain that they had lost one of their number.

Such is the ghost-tiger, and how strangely like to the wer-wolves of the north, and how aptly conditioned are both to their surroundings. In our view, what twist of the mind, what trend of folk-lore, has created these terrible children of imagination ; or in the view of others, how are they come, and why are they come, these malevolent realities ?

In the Malayan jungle, what might not live ? For the scoffer, let him stay overlong in the jungle when darkness has come, and let him tell, when he has had his fill, what manner of living thing makes one-tenth of all the sounds he has heard ; let him name the things that are astir to frighten all the lesser kinds, and that dictate from time to time if sound, or a silence more sounding, shall prevail. Let him

then explain these stories told to me by the man who had lived them through. He may use those easy terms "mistake," "coincidence," "delusion," and what-not, but these will not always serve ; and could one eliminate their rightful use—as, indeed, one often can—what then ?

The incidents of which I shall tell are those that happened to a man—I will call him "A"—who had lived for long among the natives of a certain little town at the eastern end of Java. A thorough knowledge of, and respect for, native forms of thought was one of his possessions ; another was a familiarity with jungle-craft, and the credit of eight tigers slain in the wild country round his station. News was brought to "A" one day that a tiger of more than usual repute was in the neighbourhood : great damage had been suffered by the natives, many bullocks had been slain, and the tiger had become notorious in all the outlying district. He had been seen repeatedly, traps had been set—traps that never failed—guns had been levelled at him, and yet he had passed unscathed : clearly he was no normal tiger. His footprints were easily found, and the examination of them caused

Of Wer-Tigers

much shaking of heads and catching of the breath, for here was the secret of his immunity from trap and gun. The footprints bore the stigma of the rimau hantu—one print was notably smaller and more shallow than the other three : this tiger had one small print for one hind pad, and it was plain that he was a ghost-tiger, for all ghost-tigers go so. “A” knew this thing, for he had seen before, as have other Europeans, these tracks that always have one small print, always left by the passing of a rimau hantu that all men dread. This was why the white man with his superior weapons and his reputation as a slayer of tigers had been called so far afield.

Long was the hunt for that tiger ; but he was not slain. His kills were found, and trap-guns set in his path ; he was often heard to pass the snare, and the gun repeatedly went off, yet when in the morning the striped corpse, shot through from shoulder to shoulder, should have been found, nothing was there to mark the events of the night save a halting in that uneven footprint. His origin was freely discussed, and he was well known to be the malevolent spirit of an old man not long dead. Was not the tiger old too ? Was not his skin

poor of colour and very patchy? And soon more definite things were known. Bullocks in plenty were slain; a toll was taken from every village herd save one, and this herd belonged to the dead man's nearest relative.

Since the Malay could not kill the tiger, and the white man too had failed, other and more subtle means must be tried: the relative was accordingly summoned, and in solemn conclave asked as to the means employed to preserve his cattle. His method was simple. Around one horn of each beast he had tied a shred of the dead man's sarong (nether garment), and no beast so marked had been touched, though others grazing with them were inevitably slain.

The rimau hantu knew his own and spared. He, then, should spare them all, for every villager would use the dead man's sarong as a pass-over mark for his cattle. But here was the difficulty: the entire sarong had been used for this one flock, and no other was to be obtained: the dead man had possessed but one. Meanwhile things were not improving; nightly he took some cherished beast; nightly he would brave the trap-guns and go unscathed; neither the cunning of the villagers nor all

Of Wer-Tigers

the machinations of the white man could bring about his end.

It was their own efforts that at last freed the villagers from the terror ; poor native ceremony that saved their flocks, as the relative had saved his. A meeting of the whole village was called, and, on the suggestion of the relative, a mission to the dead man's grave was made, and with much ritual the place was swept and garnished, ordered ceremony was performed, and the mission returned. It was effectual. The dead one's spirit was appeased : he ceased from his nocturnal wanderings, and the tiger with one small footprint, that, always near, could never be shot, that could repeatedly pass through trap-guns and escape modern sporting rifles and practised jungle-craft, never visited the place again. The ghost-tiger was gone, all the village was at peace again, and " A " returned to his station, unable to account by any straining of his philosophy for the things that he had seen, and yet undoubting of their reality. But this did not finish his experience of unnatural tigers.

The place where " A " was stationed is a little Dutch Javanese town, fairly populous

as native towns go, and well-ordered to a degree unimagined by those not acquainted with Dutch rule in Java. Surrounding the station quarters is a fenced compound, over the fence at the end distant from the house is an enclosed tennis court, and then—and all round—the town. Now, one night as “A” and a friend were sitting in the house, a growl that there was no mistaking was heard close to the door. The growl was followed by a scream, and both men got their rifles and made for the open door ; as they reached it a Hindu servant fell through it and into the room. There was no doubt about him, he was frightened near out of his senses, and as for his fellow-servant, he had collapsed upon the steps outside. Both had seen the tiger trot by within a few yards of them ; they had seen the horrid glow of his eyes as he had turned towards the house lights, and terrified had turned to run for the house and safety. But the tiger, unconcerned, went on with his loose soft stride towards the corner of the compound where the ponies lived. Here the poor beasts were shivering and sweating, so frightened that they could not be handled, but no tiger was there.

Of Wer-Tigers

In the compound were many monkeys, chained and caged : and if anybody knows a tiger it is the monkeys. There was a chattering from their corner, and then that cry that tells all the jungle beasts, and man himself, if he is wise enough to know it, that a tiger is near. The monkeys all saw him, and they told it clearly, and yet when search was made he could not be found. He must have jumped the high compound fence and gone over to the tennis court. But search for him there was vain ; beyond were only the streets of the town, but natives coming and going in the streets knew nothing of the tiger. Although two men and many beasts had seen him pass through the compound, he was not to be found.

There was nothing to do but wait till morning, and follow his tracks, and find others who had watched his going. When morning came, no tracks were there, no one outside had seen him. His footfall with its soft pad pad had left no print ; no ordinary tiger could come into the town and leave it unnoticed by the natives in the street.

What, then, did " A " hear that growled as only tigers can, and went with that soft footfall ? What did the two Hindus see ?

What did the monkeys see that made them give their tiger cry? What made the ponies sweat and tremble and stampede, as only tigers can make them? No one ever knew. Two white men, two Hindus, several ponies, and what is more, many monkeys all had to say that they had made the same mistake, all had to say that their senses had tricked them.

At least, the men would say it : but I do not suppose that the monkeys would, and I would dearly like to have their account of that night's doings.

Of Healing

“ **I**N the year 1536 the great King François sent a great army to Turin to recover the cities and castles which had been taken by the Marquis de Guast, lieutenant-general of the emperor. Where Monsieur the Constable, then grand master, was lieutenant-general of the army, and Monsieur de Montejan was colonel-general of the infantry, to whom I was then surgeon. A great part of the army having arrived at the pass of Suze, we found the enemy holding the passage and having made certain forts and trenches insomuch that to make them dislodge and quit the place it was necessary to fight, where there were many killed and wounded, as many on one side as the other, but the enemy were constrained to retire and gain the castle, which was taken in part by Captain Le Rat, who climbed with many soldiers from his com-

pany on a little hill, from whence they fired directly on the enemy."

This is the description of the first campaign of that greatest of army surgeons and best and most human of chroniclers—Ambroise Pare. The brave Captain Le Rat, who climbed on the little hill, "received a shot from an arquebus in the ankle of his right foot, where-with he suddenly fell to the ground and then said, "Now the Rat is taken." But the Rat was in good hands, for Pare cared for him, and he has the distinction of being the first patient on whom Pare made the famous report—"I dressed him, and God healed him."

Now Ambroise Pare was a great man. Even if modern surgery may not be much inclined to the use of decoctions of little puppies, just born, boiled in oil of lilies as a dressing, many modern surgeons will admit that some of the wounded in the Great War would have done singularly well under the care of Ambroise Pare.

Lest those who are strictly modern in their views, and are not given to praising times that are past, should think this an overestimate of Pare's skill, let them turn to the case of Monsieur Le Marquis d'Auret. Having read

Of Healing

the whole of the case, let them ask themselves what more, with the advantage of the accumulated knowledge of the intervening four centuries, they would have done that would have been of service to this gallant gentleman who had "a kind look and a gracious speech."

When the old soldier surgeon had done his work, when he had seen his much-beloved patient walk again in the garden of his château, and spread good cheer among his people, he said, as was ever his wont, "I dressed him, and God healed him."

There is no doubting this man's attitude, no question of his knowledge or his faith. He did his best for the patient, and his best was what his keen insight into anatomy and physiology, and a great and kindly human understanding dictated. And when he had done his best his work ended. He dressed the man—God healed him. He did what a skilled man could do for his suffering fellow—he put him in the way to being made whole again. The rest was for a higher power than his—it was for God, if so He willed, to heal him.

Now Pare was a hardy man, and those who read him only partially might dub him a callous old ruffian. That he most certainly

was not ; but none may term him squeamish, or deem him one given to undue sentimentality, or to the underrating of his own powers as a healer. Nevertheless, with Pare it was always " God healed him."

Taking some liberties with historical fact, and leaving the great King François, we may make passage of near three centuries and again meet great surgeons. These men were likewise not given to sentimentality, nor to underrating their powers ; but they " dressed " their patients, and, had they summed up the accounts of their cases in the admirably brief manner of Ambroise Pare, they would have said " the *vis medicatrix Naturæ* healed him."

They did their best, and their best was probably a little better than Pare knew, and having done that they left it to Nature to heal the man. It may be that here we have no great difference in thought, but only in words. It may be that Pare's " God healed him " and the master surgeon's " Nature healed him " are in reality expressions only outwardly different owing to a lapse of time, but similar in connotation. For myself, I am prepared to believe the expressions to be synonyms, and between the *vis medicatrix Naturæ* and the

Of Healing

vis medicatrix Dei there is a difference only of time—not of meaning.

But now we are in a different age we might search far and wide in the modern literature of surgical operations before we found a case reported as being healed by Nature or by God. To-day the surgeon feels that the whole duty of healing the patient has devolved upon him. The doctor cures the patient—very few are left to get well.

It would be stupid, and out of keeping with the things of to-day, to deplore the fact that the modern surgeon cures the patient, and does not content himself with putting him in the way for God to heal him. The man would be a bore who would ask the surgeon to stay his hand at any stage in his work and permit God to do the rest. But a man might very well raise his voice and implore modern medicine to give the *vis medicatrix Naturæ* a chance.

It was no bad partnership—the dresser and the healer. Were the partnership still accorded more recognition, there would be fewer faddists in the world to-day, for in truth had not modern medicine so much insisted on curing humanity, there would be less occasion for those who

demand that all cures are only of God. The faith healer and his kin have their place, and their place is just that which modern medicine gives them ; they represent one member of the partnership driven from the board by the other member.

But many will cry "Laudator," and say that it were well enough for Pare, four centuries ago, to admit a partner to his practice since what he could do was as nothing compared to what the modern doctor can effect with the vast resources of science at his command. And that, in its way, is true enough. Pare had no system of antiseptics, though he used turpentine with great success. He was wholly without the aid of anæsthetics. Anæsthesia and asepsis are words to conjure with. We all know the blessings that the prevention of sepsis, and the banishment of consciousness and pain, have proved to suffering humanity. We rightly venerate the pioneers in their discovery. But I wonder, at times, if these giants would be quite satisfied with the use which is made of their legacies. In the days before these gifts were given the master surgeons were the elect. Only the few were fitted for the work, and they were fitted by reason

Of Healing

of their practised dexterity, their knowledge, their judgment, their readiness of resource ; and by a hundred fine, brave, manly qualities that made them great men. But to-day, thanks to the dual blessing of anæsthesia and asepsis, every man who, determining to be a doctor rather than a linendraper, is able to obtain a patient, may tamper with the innermost secrets of the human body to the end that he may effect a cure. It is made easy for the sons of Æsculapius to take too much upon them. The faith healer undoubtedly has his place, and it is just the place which modern medicine has given him.

Of Coco-nuts and Providence

THEY used to tell us, when we were small children, that it was due to the workings of a wise Providence that all the big, heavy fruits grew on the ground while the little, light ones were hung up in the trees. And there was much at hand to make us ready believers. We could point with a smug satisfaction to the big, fat marrows, and argue how splendid it was that they and the pumpkins were not suspended from the branches as the acorns are. We could picture pumpkins falling as the autumn came, and imagine the thud among the brown leaves as the marrow fell on the pathway after the manner of the shining horse-chestnut. What a bang they would catch you, and how dangerous it would be to live near the trees ! Poor, unprotected man would have to go about bobbing and ducking, and even then he could hardly expect to escape for long ; and the little children—well, little

children would have to live indoors if they would grow up. In every country church-yard we would see it recorded that "Anne, the loving wife, was struck by a falling pumpkin." Indeed, there were no end to the horrors of the heavy fruits. And yet the whole of this philosophy is only the comfortable outcome of its environment. When they first sent geography books to teach the little boys in Australia it is said that the statement that the sun passed across the southern sky found few adherents, and tended to undermine any belief in the rest of the book. So, too, our satisfying philosophy about the acorns would not command the confidence of the little Malay boy, for what about his coco-nuts that fall by day and by night? A ripe coco-nut weighs some four pounds, and it falls from an average height of sixty feet and more. It comes to the earth with a thud that, when heard for the first time, easily makes a man believe he has had a narrow escape. Still, though this feeling is very natural in one who has had a coco-nut drop within a few inches of his head for the first time, in reality no kindly Providence was handy for his especial preservation, for it is a general truth that coco-nuts do

not hit men. As you walk they will fall with a crash at your side, behind you and before you, and they will bounce again, should they hit hard coral, higher than your head ; but they will not hit you.

I have seen two men go single file along a narrow track and a coco-nut fall between them, just missing the back man's face, just falling short of the front man's heel. There is a little path that is some thirty yards long, and four men walk its length at least ten times every day of their lives ; half a dozen nuts fall on the path daily, and yet they always drop when no one is below. Every day I get the fallen nuts out of my little fish-pond, every day the little harvest is there ; and yet, though many hours of my life are spent watching the fish, no nut has ever splashed in whilst I am looking on. There is no mystery in all this, and no chance ; and the reason for it all is well known to every Malay. Coco-nuts do not hit men, for the very simple reason that the eyes, with which every one is familiar, enable them to see what is below when they make their plunge to earth. In some places where coco-nut palms grow you will notice that they are notched with the native " monkey

Of Coco-nuts

ladder," but here the stems run even from root to crown, a stretch of smooth unbroken bark of over sixty feet. It is the island custom that the nuts are collected after they have fallen in their own due season, for the copra made from the fallen nut is better than from the nut which is picked from the tree—this is why the island is a place of perpetually falling nuts. Over a million palms are bearing, and for ever dropping their burden. Every palm carries a dozen or more of them ripe and ready to fall, all held by the most insufficient stalks, and all swinging in the ever-moving Trades. The palms are always bending and swaying, the fronds all rattling together in the breeze, with a sound as of a hard rain-shower temptingly realistic in times of drought ; the nuts are for ever dropping, and surely it is a very wonderful thing that they all time their drop so nicely that they never hit a man. For the better part of a century man has intruded himself on these islands and tended the palms, and in return the falling nut has spared him, for never in the whole island story has a man been fairly hit by a nut falling from a tree. Once a little boy was killed by a nut ; but Nature had not launched it on its journey, for it was

thoughtlessly tossed over a fence by a man who was clearing his garden. This would be almost a sufficient excuse for the coco-nut ; but the story is not finished in making this excuse, for the nut when ripped from its husk *was found to have no eyes*. This is quite true, that the only time that one of the many million coco-nuts of the islands has ever killed a human being, it was one thrown by a man, and was a blind one into the bargain. Who, after this, can well refuse to believe that it is the eyes that enable the nut to avoid man in its fall ?

It has often been laid to the charge of the coral islander that he is a lazy fellow, and indeed there is but little bustle in the common round of coral island days. But it is not his fault if life may be lived in simple comfort without making any great demands upon his energy ; it is the coco-palm that is to blame. All your pictures of the enervating lotus, the drowsy listlessness of the opium poppy, or the ensnaring tendril of the vine pale before the coco palm ; for than it there is no vegetable product more potent in the production of the real slacker. The coco-palm is the begetter of idleness, and the ordinary man has no

Of Coco-nuts

chance when in its presence : he may struggle for a time, but in the end he will be contented to sit in the sun and take what the tree will give him. Nearly all that a man of simple tastes can want will fall at his feet in plenty when his trees are bearing fruit ; and all that is demanded of him is the energy to pick up the nut and take it from its husk. With much practice at the business a man may husk ten nuts a minute, but without skill in the correct methods he will probably, after great effort, open one every few days or so. Great suspicion always attaches to stories of the shipwrecked castaway who climbs the slender palm, and opening the luscious nut drinks the refreshing milk, thereby saving his life and enabling him to preserve those of the helpless women and children. It is not every castaway who can climb a palm, and death from thirst or an enduring colic is likely to be the result of being thrown upon your own resources on a low island.

I can give no better advice to anyone who intends to be a castaway on a coral island than that he should so arrange it that an island Malay should also survive the wreck and be cast ashore with him. For the Malay can

make anything from the coco-palm. His bread and a host of dainties, his oil, his soap, his salads and vinegar, every bit of the house in which he lives, the domestic utensils with which he prepares his food, and above all, the seductive alcoholic drink on which he can get most gloriously drunk. All this he can do for his own immediate needs, and it is only the man who is very unwholesomely ambitious who will want more—and this more he can always have, for money too is made from coco-nuts. But only by the few is money classed among the things that do not matter.

The coco-nut-palm is a great temptation to him who would lead the simple life, and also to him who would acquire wealth and lead the life that is not simple. Should you be tempted to start a grove of coco-nuts then you must have great care for the details of their tending, for though the palm is so very kind to man it is somewhat exacting in the treatment it looks for in return. First, you must never expect the palms to do well in any place where they cannot hear the lap of sea waves ; and again, they must be able to listen at times to the sound of human voices, and a little singing now and again will do no harm. Concerning

Of Coco-nuts

these two things the palms are very particular.

Then you must be especially careful as to the nuts you plant, and strict rules apply to their choosing. You must get a friend to go one evening to a tree on which good ripe nuts are hanging, and you must persuade him to climb the tree and toss the nuts down to you. If the palm is not stepped it is best to tie your friend's big toes together and about a foot apart, and then the cord between the toes will catch the irregularities of the bark and help to keep his grip. When he has reached the crown and repeated the orthodox prayer to the spirit of the palm, he must pick the best nuts, and, without looking down, he must throw them to you. For your part, you must watch them as they fall, for if when they have come to rest they turn their eyes away from you you will only waste your time in picking them up : only those will grow well that look towards you. When, with careful choice, you have selected your nuts, you must still be very attentive to the manner of planting them. The holes must be made deep, and all must be prepared before the nuts are brought out for planting. Then one evening when you are painfully distended with food (this is

really absolutely necessary) you must go out very quickly and throw the nuts into the holes while you are running. Great care must be taken, too, in the actual business of throwing the nuts, for if you should straighten your arm as you launch them the stem is sure to break before your nuts are mature. If you do the whole thing aright then the trunk will shoot up straight and strong, and at the end of the fourth year some palms will yield you nuts, and by the seventh all will be in full bearing, and you on the high road to fortune. All the time your life will be very pleasant : and yet, though the coco-nut has its clients, the sphygmometer still claims its pale slaves.

XIII

Of Seals and Sea-birds

MOST men who are not out-and-out rogues, or thorough prigs, have it as a conceit that they would rather be taken by their fellows for being rather more wicked than they are. There is something terribly embarrassing for the man who is only moderately good in being taken as one who is very good indeed ; and in such a moment he is apt to feign the daredevil to avoid the embarrassment.

In fiction we are accustomed to meet with the dissolute brigand who becomes completely unmanned when he finds that the innocent maid, who is in his clutches, assumes him to be a paragon of virtue, and trusts implicitly to his sense of right doing. Every one knows the burglar who, blindly and naturally trusted by the little child, chokes back a sob of emotion and subsequently dissolves into tears. It is a horrible feeling to have some one believe

you to be perfectly good, when you know full well what you actually are. Many a mere ordinary man has felt foolish when he has discovered in what mistaken esteem some good woman held him.

There is another circumstance which can beget the same sense of humiliation. It is a shameful experience for anyone to be treated as being good and innocent by a wild animal. The shame of it may well make any man blush, for the animal only trusts him because it does not know what a brutish thing man really is. This experience does not come often. It is only rarely in the present stage of the world's story that a wild bird will rank a man equal for good manners with the people with the green heads, and perch upon him in familiarity. I have had a wild bird perch upon my shoulder, and I was ashamed. We have all seen birds perch upon the backs of sheep, and watched the Willy-wagtails accompany the cattle step by step in comradeship ; but it is embarrassing to be supposed to be as harmless as a sheep or a cow.

A huge south-easterly swell is breaking on the coral beach. The beach is a windward one, and guarded by a barrier. There is no

Of Seals and Sea-birds

break in the outlying girdle of rock, and the only manner in which a landing may be made is for the canoe to be carried over the barrier on the crest of a wave.

The Malays hold their paddles, and watch the Trade-driven rollers come up from the south-east. On a sudden they give way. The roller has us on its crest, a breathless interval of triumphant god-like motion, and we are again human and struggling in the swirl lest the boat, quitted in one mysterious moment by eight men, be dragged down the beach again, and crashed to splinters on the barrier over which we have ridden. Drenched and exhausted we are landed in a realm where man is not known. Only the sea birds and the land crabs hold sway here. For the whole of a tropical day we may wander, and be regarded by all wild things as no more to be dreaded than a bush—a bush that will not become a bear. The thousands of birds that are nesting regard us without fear, every one of them may be picked up and handled as we would take up a kitten from the hearth-rug.

That one day must ever stand as a landmark. All day I walked as Adam walked, and all wild things regarded me as a friend. I con-

sorted with boobies and frigate birds as an equal. I moved among terns and mutton birds as a friend.

Only as the sun was lowering there came some migrants, which, knowing man in other lands had learned what manner of brute he is, treated me as birds have rightly learned to treat mankind. After my day of fraternity with their kind their suspicion shocked me ; but they were right ; and the knowledge that they were right was depressing. It is surely a trick of fate that upon this remote beach, where man was regarded as being like the people with the green heads for good manners, the *Emden* found her last resting-place.

Another beach. This one not of coral, but of the pure white fragments of shells, ground to the finest sand against the granite pile of one of the islands in the Bight. As the ship's boat nears the shore the seals come off to greet her. Great trusting brown eyes, like those of a favourite spaniel, regard us with curiosity and comradeship as the great sleek creatures play about and welcome us. By seals we are convoyed to the beach. Seals accompany our landing, watch our unloading, and set the boat upon its journey to the ship

Of Seals and Sea-birds

again. When the siren has sounded, and she is turned to sea again, we are left alone upon the island home of the seals. It would be impossible to be left in better company. Seals superintend all our camping arrangements, watch us to and fro on our comings and goings, and decide that we are friends. As friends we dwelt with them for a happy week.

At first, the old bulls that are watching over their cows and young pups regard us with suspicion and chase us from their nurseries ; and at first, when we do not know the meaning of it all, we regard them as unfriendly creatures. But after a day or so, a mutual understanding is arrived at, and we treat the bull's anxiety with respect, and they treat our regard with a becoming consideration. For the bachelors, and for the young cows, there is an open and unrestrained comradeship ; for the old bulls, their cows and their new-born pups, an unostentatious politeness. Before the week is done, all the seals—old bulls, young bulls, cows and pups—are our friends. They lie about our camp. They look at us with trust as we pass them by, and straightway fall asleep again. They come in little parties and hold meetings on our beach, and of an evening

Unscientific Essays

we have been equally divided—eight seals and eight human beings—all enjoying the twilight peace upon the white sand. In our passages from island to island through the surf they would always accompany us. They swim beside us as attendant mermaids, while we struggled clumsily to make our way in safety, and their anxiety to see us across unharmed often made the passage the more difficult. In the end, when our stay is done and they convoy our boat back to the ship, it is easy to believe that the beautiful trusting creatures are as sorry to lose us as we are to part from them.

But we have only to turn from the sandy beach upon which we lived to the rocks beyond to find the story of man's dealing with the seal. Hundreds of carcasses of seals strew the uplands of the islands. Carcasses of seals killed in brutality, flayed in brutality for the sake of the leather in their pelts. Shot, knocked on the head, battered to death and flayed for a gain of no more than forty pence, since commercially the seals are "hair seals." Few human activities can be more brutalizing than the descent upon lonely islands and the remorseless slaughter of the confiding seals.

Of Seals and Sea-birds

Every detail of the traffic is revolting, every step in its pursuit marked by degrading acts of cruelty. The sealers come ashore in Utopia, and leave an island strewn with flayed corpses reeking with fat and blood ; and the outright dead, which foul the air, are in better case than the wounded.

Now here is a lesson in humiliation. 'The last visitors who had broken into the sanctuary of our island were sealers. Some thirty months ago there had been a dreadful period of brutal massacre. Bulls, cows, pups, every limpid-eyed trusting one of them that had not escaped to sea was killed and flayed and left to rot. But all is forgotten by the seals. They still regard man as a comrade and a friend, they will still permit a child to pat them on the head. If I could invoke a curse, with the full responsibility that it would be effective, I would ask it to fall on him who, visiting Pearson's Isles, would club to death those seals that trust man so much that he is shamed.

Of Moon-gazing

THERE is a peculiar delight, and one that lasts from childhood far into old age, in the possession of something all one's very own. It is, I suppose, because it flatters our wonderful sense of individual importance that it is pleasing to imagine that something is ours—and ours alone—to do with as we will. It is also because it is a vanity of which we can very rarely be certain, for there are very few things, even of all the things we cherish most, that belong to us alone :—there are very few things that others cannot take from us, no matter how feeble we may be. This is the reason, I imagine, why I have always taken an especial pleasure in admiring, with all the happy sense of absolute possession, my one peculiar chattel in Nature, my pathway to the moon. For me—and for me only—there is one silver path which starts right at my feet, and leads with quivering brightness across the

Of Moon-gazing

waves, far out to the ocean and to the moon. From the wet white sand and the shining rocks of the coral shore across the dancing surf and breaking waves, out into the undulating brilliance of the ocean swell, I could walk in silvery directness. It is a path not difficult to tread in imagination, for it is so straight : there is never a turning in the whole great length of it, and no side-track by which one might go astray in all the delightful pilgrimage.

Time and again I have travelled on that silver journey, and as the pathway is my own, so too are my memories of the romances of its wandering. I have a memory of my islands when the moon is at its full, when the palms are shining and silvered, when the sand is white with an added purity, and when all things stand clear cut—cold and real, and yet withal mysterious, in their contrast of white light and black shadow. At these times, so white is the coral sand, so silvered are the palms, and so clear is the brightness of the scene, that most of all it reminds the wanderer from the North of his snow pictures—and this despite the gentle warmth of the splendid night. Then, when the moon is at its full, is the time to wander with most perfect reality

along the high-road of enchantment, then is the hour to tread your pathway to the magic silver disk that creates and makes beautiful all this fairyland.

The memory of one such scene kept perfect for all those moments when memory must be the principal source of pleasure is a thing well-gained, a thing to cherish and preserve, and I would lay it down as a maxim to be written up in letters of gold, that "the great duty of youth is the storing of happy pictures for use in those days in which the things within, rather than the things without, are those in which the mind takes pleasure." There comes a time to every one when the things that do not matter play a bigger part than do those trifles which are regarded by the world as all-important. No millionaire whose receptive years were spent amidst the sordid machinery of modern wealth-making could ever buy the pleasure that is the property of that humble individual in whose mind are stored a thousand happy memories, a thousand pictures of beautiful scenes. No late developed craze to collect old china, and to have mansions stored with costly works of art, can satisfy so completely a longing to see the beautiful, as can the simple

Of Moon-gazing

scene, recalled with closed eyes, that belongs to some pauper. No potentate should dare to pity Hugh Clifford's Awang Itam with his prison-bent frame and tortured limbs, who, though distorted and enfeebled, was still happy in his memories, still glad in the scenes of the gaining of his heart's desire.

Different men take pleasure in the storing of different pictures. I have known an imaginary walk from Charing Cross to Oxford Circus rehearsed with evident pleasure and much earnestness by men ten thousand miles away from the scenes of their imagination. Every foot of the way will be discussed and argued over, every shop has to be put into its proper place, and much bitterness may come from a difference of opinion as to where exactly in the Haymarket that shop, at which one buys those jolly pruning knives and fish spears, comes in. Competitions in the topography of London streets, in which a particularly exact knowledge of the situation of places of refreshment is demanded, are common in coral island days. It is only under such conditions that one finds out how vast a thing is memory : how filled with scenes, with routes, and associations is the average human mind. In solitude,

I have many times made imaginary pilgrimages through London's streets ; there were not many gaps among the sequence of the shops, and of some—more especially those in which old books are stored—but little of even the most trivial detail was lacking. One day I will again walk, in my imagination, the moonlit coral, and be happy in that journey too.

When I was a small boy I was told, as small boys invariably are, that in the moon there dwelt an old man, and I accepted him, though of my own imagination I should never have created him. I recognized the " old man in the moon " as I recognized the seven colours in the rainbow—they were there, so folks said, for every one to see, and not to see them must surely argue some deficiency. But now my faith in the " old man in the moon " is gone, I do not believe in him any more ; for just as surely as we see his misty outline, and construct his uncertain features from the shadows, so surely do the Malays of my islands weave another, and an entirely different, fancy. For them and for their children the dweller is an old woman, and concerning her there is a legend that is told in the moonlight by half-believing speakers to never-doubting listeners.

Of Moon-gazing

The old man of my childhood was supposed to be engaged in the harmless occupation of carrying a bundle of sticks, but it is very different with the old woman, for she is a malevolent person, and her baneful task is the making of a fishing net for the enmeshing and destruction of this world of ours. The net upon which she is engaged is the kind called the jala, which is essentially a circular net thrown by hand. The jala net is a plain flat piece of fine meshing having a border of chain around its circumference, and it is used in this wise : it is grasped by the central point, so that the edge, weighted by the chain, falls uniformly down, and the net becomes cone-shaped like the extinguisher of a candle. When stealthily wading through the clear shallow water, the Malay carries the net across his arm, and with a sudden twist he flings it from him ; it flies out and spreads in the air, and then it drops over and encloses any shoal of fish that he can discover and approach. Much skill is exercised in the throwing of the jala so that it spreads uniformly and flat, and the chain-weighted edge falls truly over the fish, and armed with this net a good thrower can make great hauls of the shoals of fish

that delight in the shallows of the lagoon.

Such is the net that the old woman in the moon is making, and it is easy to call its pictures from the shadows. The tradition says that when the old woman has finished the weaving of her jala, she is going to cast it from the moon, and it will fall upon the earth ; the weighted edge will enclose all things, we will all be enmeshed in the great moon-jala, and then will be the end. From all time, since the moon took her place in the heavens, has that jala been a-making, and the end would have come long since were it not for another inhabitant of the moon. In the moon picture that the island child is taught to construct, there is, besides the old woman and her unfinished jala, a very large rat, and it is this rat that has saved the world from destruction during all the ages. As fast as the malevolent old woman can make her net, the kindly rat nibbles it away : she is perpetually at work weaving, and ever weaving at the mesh, and the rat as ceaselessly and as patiently destroys her handiwork. All this can be seen plainly. But the end will surely come, the rat will tire some day, or mayhap the old woman's fingers will be too speedy for him, and then the jala will be made, and cast.

Of Moon-gazing

Ere the casting of the jala, and when the moon is at its full, go down to the shore, follow your silver path, and look for the old woman. But you must be careful not to follow your path too far. People have been known to do this. Once a Malay woman, attracted by the beauty of the moon, started to walk to it from the deck of the boat on which she was travelling : the silver path was clear, and to her it seemed an ideal one to wander in search of beautiful flowers. On and on she walked, and (Sir Frank Swettenham assures us) her journey was only interrupted by some Chinese fishermen, who found her with her head above water and still upright and lively, although the sea was some four fathoms deep where she was picked up.

In the habit of gazing on the heavens that solitude begets, I have been well rewarded, and as I have followed my moon-path, so I have marked the silver way that leads to Venus. On moonless nights, and when the tropic sky is clear and bright with stars, then Venus shines with a pale and wonderful light : she can map your shadow on the sand ; she can beautify the palm scene with a wonderful brightness, and give a silvery pathway over

Unscientific Essays

the dancing waves. Her path is not so bright nor so distinct as is the moon's, but, as befits her, it is of an alluring beauty, and not so easy in the following.

When moon-gazing I have watched the passing of showers, and seen that most delicate of all the effects of light—the rainbow made of moonshine : when the rainbows that the sun makes in the glare of the day fade from our sight as the rain ceases, I think that they must die, and when the moonlight shines upon a rain-shower, it is the purified ghost of a sun-rainbow that makes the lovely arch of light.

Once in the islands, in all the beauty of a soft clear night, in a sky picture that knows no limits save those imposed by the horizon, I have seen the moon totally eclipsed, and my pathway to fairyland blotted out. Then, looking down the silvery way of my tract across the sea, I have watched my moon-road fade, and lost my way upon my pilgrimage, as the shadow of eclipse has slowly worn away the silver thread that Theseus-like I followed to my goal. First from the silver disk the edge is taken, and on and on with steady and relentless purpose the dead black stain grows ever across the silver brightness. Light clouds drift

Of Moon-gazing

over the moon, and with the passing of each one, the stain appears to grow the faster. A cloud more dense than all the others comes across the scene, and with its tardy journey the light grows less. Soon nothing but a slender ring of brightness remains, and with the dying of the moon come sounds, confused and distant, through the coco-palms.

In the Malay village strange things are being done, for the fading away of the moon must be an occasion for the practice of whatever is left to the people of their primitive spirit worship. In the face of strange doings in Nature, strange survivals of the deeply seated animism are always apt to overshadow the doctrines of Islam. There is a temporary eclipse of the orthodox religion as well as of the moon. The sounds that come to me through the trees, lulled and softened by the moan of the barrier surf, are made by the people rousing their goods and chattels, striking their house posts and their walls, shaking their kitchen utensils, and generally letting all their belongings know that something unwonted is taking place. The object of this ceremony is the awakening of the souls of all these things, that they may not be taken unaware at this

time of threatened danger : it is really the outcome of the Malay's deep-seated characteristic that shows politeness to all things living or unliving.

There is nothing like a system of Nature worship to develop a race of natural gentlemen—and the Malay is a natural gentleman—polite to the birds, the beasts, and the trees, as to the stranger that is within his gates. Would he kill a beast, he must apologize to it and blame the blade that does the deed ; would he trap a bird, he must address its spirit with formal politeness, and he may not, without breach of etiquette, offend wantonly the spirit of the tree he fells. Politeness, therefore, coupled perhaps with a desire for insurance, demands that, when something so unusual as an eclipse is taking place, all things should be prepared to meet danger, and just as he must waken his wife and children, a Malay must rouse up the soul of his rice dish and his house post.

The noises cease, the sound of pots and pans whose souls are awakening dies down ; the house posts are left to slumber again, and the women and children return to bed. My moon path grows clear once more, and once more I

Of Moon-gazing

may find my way out into the brightness where I shall always love to wander ; for surely if one may gain his heart's desire it will be somewhere on his wandering along his own moonpath.

Of a Horse Muster

THERE is a peculiar quality in vast open spaces. When at sea we are used to seeing the same scene all round us, we are accustomed to the line of the horizon completely encircling us. As one would say in more accepted fashion, the sky meets sea all round. But we are not so familiar with the landscape in which sky meets earth all round. We do not often wander in places where great stretches of the earth's surface are as level as the sea. One traveller in desert places has described the effect produced by a completely encircling land horizon as the feeling of being in the centre of a vast gramophone record. For me the presence of a complete land horizon has always produced the feeling of being on the very top of the earth. It ever seems that beyond the line at which earth meets sky all round, the earth sloped downwards on every hand. This impression begets another.

Of a Horse Muster

There is always the feeling that by journeying one will certainly see something different beyond the line at which the view ahead is arrested. When travelling across Illusion Plains on the Birdsville track there is an ever-present longing to get beyond the next ridge, for on the other side will surely be a change of scene. But the ridge is never passed—it is the rim of the gramophone disk which moves with us—and the longed-for change of scene does not come until the whole great pilgrimage of the Plains is done.

Exploration has its romances in every land; but the terrors of the jungle, the danger of wild beasts and the perils of mountain peak and flooded stream seem to me as mere exciting experiences in a sporting adventure compared with the horror of the endless journey towards the land horizon, faced by Australian pioneers. Treeless, waterless, pitiless and seeming unending are these gibber plains. Without incident, without stirring experience, save a constant aching uncertainty as to what lay beyond that line ahead; such was their exploration. Of all flat solitudes I think the gibber plains have precedence in terror. The hot and shining gibber stones packed close like an uncemented

Unscientific Essays

mosaic pavement, the water mirage which the fierce sun calls forth, and in which great lakes of glistening wave-stirred water are ever waiting at that deadly line ahead ; that is the picture which may make real to anyone what the verb "to perish" meant to the pioneers. The gibber plains, the seeming top of the world, are still terrible. Even the motor cannot deprive them of their desolate awfulness.

There is another type of plain which gives an encircling land horizon, but wears a far more kindly aspect, since it produces vegetation instead of that unending series of small flat stones laid in the haphazard, but regular, pavement known as gibber. To the cattle man, if to few others, the blue bush plains mean much. Endless miles of a restful misty blue, the blue of lavender bushes knee high, a sea of peaceful bloom which rests upon the inhospitable floor of sand and stone—such are the blue bush plains.

Far away across the blue bush there is a little cloud of dust. To a townsman's eye it is nothing more. To those who live upon the plains, and have the long sight of folk who live in wide spaces, it means the advent of a

Of a Horse Muster

mob of horses rounded up from the three thousand square miles of Australia, which compose one great unfenced cattle-run. Three thousand square miles of country is large as a farm is reckoned in other lands, but it is not large for a holding in the land of blue bush. Over these wide plains roam cattle and horses. Beef is the product of the blue bush, and cattle are the first consideration ; but horses run on all the wide limits of the plains, and from the run they must at intervals be rounded up and mustered and brought in to the stockyards. The little cloud of dust in the distance heralds the advent of a mob of bush horses, born and bred in the wild, and which have not yet dreamed of bridle or bit, or thought to have man as a master. Before long, the cloud of dust is seen to be definitely moving towards us, and in front of the dust there may be distinguished, every now and again, a man on horseback who leads the mob. Later, upon either side of the cloud, other figures may be seen as they wheel this way and that as some horse attempts to break from the mob and return to the wild. Five hundred bush-bred horses, led by a man on a horse, flanked by two more men, and pressed on by other two,

Unscientific Essays

come neighing and nervous across the plain and to the stockyard. A moment or two, and all is noise and neighing and dust. The whole mob has swept across the plains and is upon us, for although the dust-cloud seemed to move so slowly when first we saw it, it has taken form and enveloped us while we are still debating as to who is in the lead and who is behind with the pack-horses. All the animals in this moving, sounding mass must be brought to face the stockyard rails ; they must be rounded up and held outside the yard before the more leisurely, but even more exacting, business of yarding and drafting is done. But most of the horses are wild animals, and the stockyard is to them a threat and a danger. There is an incessant neighing and whinnying ; every horse is vocal, every neigh is answered, and it is easy to see that the whole mob is actuated by impulses initiated and correlated by the voicing of emotions present in them all.

In the whole excited mass there are five hundred horses which until now have known no restraint—their restraint now consists of only four mounted men. They may fidget, and kick, and bite, and neigh, but they are

Of a Horse Muster

held—held by nothing more than four of their own kind each with a man astride. But they are held only until some psychological thing runs as a wireless message through the mob, and with a neighing and a kicking the whole dense mass breaks. It refuses to face the rails ; a something is communicated to the whole packed mass of horses, and in a moment there is a break for the open plains.

Now watch the progress of this instantly communicated determination to dash for liberty. The mob breaks, and as it breaks the watchful men on its flanks turn their horses towards the quarter whence the trouble comes. There is a flying of dust, and a wild rush directly for the open and away from the stockyard rails. On the one hand are wild, fit, untrammelled bush-horses dashing for liberty, on the other there are trained men mounted on, maybe, tired station-horses. There may be a wide stampede. Dust flies far over the plain, but the result is ever the same—the station horse with the man astride outwits the wild-horse leader, and the mob is pressed together again, once more to face the stockyard rails. Surely this is a wonderful thing. The finest stallion in the mob will lead the whole crowd

Unscientific Essays

of horses straight for the open—one horse will be the instantly recognized leader of five hundred. He is unimpeded by a rider, he is perhaps a far superior horse to the one on which the man rides, and he may have a good start and a wholehearted desire to be away.

The chase may be a long one ; but the man on the horse will head him and turn him back. The performance may be repeated many times—the result is always the same : the horse, handicapped by the weight of a man, but urged on by a man's will, and guided by a man's brain, will win. What the horse with the horse's brain can get out of its body is not so good as that which a man with a man's brain can get out of a horse's body, even though the horse has to carry the dead weight of the man. A horse with a man's brain, one thinks, would be a great racer, and the sons of Ixion, maybe, were such.

Evidently even the merest physical abilities of an anatomical body are not to be measured in terms of muscle and bone and tendon. What we *can* do is what we *will* do. And perhaps we can do better than that. A man's brain can make a horse capable of better action than that which its own brain can call forth.

Of a Horse Muster

In some ages philosophers have fancied that man himself is capable of better things than those his own immediate and unguided dictates prompt. And it may be that it is so.

Of Oily Patches

I HAVE been fishing. That is my excuse. It is quite impossible to sit and fish and not fall upon a reflective mood, and see in the dancing waves all manner of things from which thoughts may be woven. To-day my thoughts were all of vagueness and the vanity of man. There was nothing of the ideal or the poetic in my mind as I sat on the coral, with a shark-line tied to an empty kerosene tin by my side, and a smaller line in my hands.

At any moment, had my thoughts been far away, the starting of the kerosene tin down the coral beach, or a jerk on my hand line, would have rudely pulled me back to the monotonous reality of coral island life. And so I have been looking at the water, watching the waves sweep on and tumble back in that confusion of their own making, which is the greatest safeguard that the coral island has against the never-ceasing inroads of the sea.

Of Oily Patches

As I sit and watch the water beneath which my hooks are lying, I can see what I have seen a hundred times before—a patch of water smoother than that all around it. You must know this appearance well ; you will see it from the deck of any ship time and again, you will see it from the shore ; you will see it wherever you may gaze upon that keeper of more than half of the world's mysteries—the waters of the ocean. A patch of water, perhaps some few yards across, perhaps much larger, looks smooth and oily, whilst all around it dance the wind flecks that cover all else on the face of the ocean—that is a thing that every one has seen, if it has impressed itself as a memory picture or not. How many people know what those smooth patches are ? When we see so conspicuous a thing as is this that I have pictured, and yet do not know its meaning or its cause, how shall we point the finger of scorn at those who know the meaning of a thousand such things, and yet whose observations, when they do not suit us, we reject as idle superstition ? These are the thoughts that I have been thinking as I watched the oily patches move on.

Ask an enlightened white man what causes

Unscientific Essays

that smooth surface : if he be honest he will say he does not know, if he be considered clever he will likely tell you it is an eddy caused by the varying nature of the bottom maybe, or again it is the wind that does it—a vortex, or a what-not, and beneath names he will bury his ignorance. He will tell you many causes, but he will not likely tell you the right one ; nor will he believe it when you tell him.

Ask a Malay of the meaning of that patch where all the ripples fade, and he will tell you at once that beneath that spot one fish has killed another. Floating evidence of deep-sea tragedies, clues to murders, and to the Malay large-print pages in the wondrous book of Nature, are these smooth places in the ocean. Over each victim floats his monument, that all life above those mysterious depths may see that once again the never-ending drama of the slayer and the slain has been enacted. The murderer has done his deed, has eaten his fill of the spoil ; but though his crime was done in the depths of the sea, yet all the world may know of his handiwork.

A patch of feathers and some blood amongst the junipers tells us no more plainly than that familiar appearance of the water tells the Malay

Of Oily Patches

that one of Nature's tragedies is done, and more than that, it tells him that probably his enemy, the shark, is a search for prey. The Malay's explanation is a true one, and the reason of the whole thing is as simple as are all Nature's secrets, if only he who would probe them sets about it rightly. The smooth surface is caused by the oil that always escapes from a fish when it is torn—it is "cod-liver oil" that smooths the water.

Watch as the tide comes in, and when the water inside the barrier is deep enough, you will see the black sickles of the sharks cruising in line, as the evil ones search for the fish that live among the rocks. Then, alas, you will see the smooth water-circles moving on in the tide, and then if you do not want your light line broken you had better pull it in, for you will catch no fish save sharks now. Your only consolation will be that soon your kerosene tin will start forward with a rattle, and you will grip your shark line and land a black-and-white murderer.

Should you want to see the Malay's theory put to the test, rip up your shark, cut into his liver and set him awash in the waves: you may then, as you watch your lines, see a smooth

patch of water, starting from your shark, set out in the drift for half a mile to sea.

Now when a brown man tells you that smooth water-patches float in the sea as the outward and visible signs of the murder of one fish by its fellows, it is easy to class his belief, as enlightened travellers are wont to do, as a mere native superstition ; yet it is no more a superstition than the connecting of the feathers and the blood with the death of a bird.

How then, of the hundred and one other “ native superstitions ” of which the proof does not lie so near at hand ?

Well, we will do as others do, and if they do not fit the philosophy of that portion of the globe over which ancient Rome has spread her forms of thought, we will say they are impossible, that they are contrary to all that we have been taught, and that though they are interesting as ethnological relics, they are based on errors of observation or faulty argument.

If there be anything in you that somewhat kicks over the traces of the world of thought that claims you, I will tell you that these “ errors of observation ” are made by men

who read every mood and tense of Nature, know every phase of the happenings amongst her children, and beside whom the Western is as a clumsy, ill-seeing child in the presence of the goddess. The stories that we have all been told of the wonderful methods of following wounded game, of finding wild beasts, and capturing with the most flimsy of appliances the tyrants of the jungle world, are all the results of this wonderful power of observation, which we cannot even vaguely imitate, and yet the findings of which, if they do not suit our philosophy, we say are untrue.

Were we truly honest, we would say to the brown man somewhat after this fashion : All knowledge worth possessing is the understanding of the happenings of Nature, and by the smatterings of it that we have gleaned and gathered into books, we have tended to make ourselves unfit to draw any more from the original sources ; your observations will therefore be new knowledge for us, and we must make our odds and ends of book-learning fit in with them. For this is indeed the case. Modern-day man has had his head turned by that tithe of the world's learning that the Roman-taught world has gleaned. By his

book-lore, by his long-confirmed habit of reading instead of thinking, and by his generations-old custom of turning to books of print and not to the book of Nature, he has isolated all his instincts from the realm that taught him all. He has kicked down the ladder by which he has climbed to the first floor of the house of learning, and there he sits with a feeling of superiority, not rightly his, all his senses numbed and all his instincts crushed.

The little philosophy that modern man has made, based on the few facts that he in accumulated generations has been able to glean, has now become his refuge, and under it he shelters in times of trouble, or when his pride is hurt. He has long ago forgotten how incomplete are the premises on which his "comfortable words" are built; he has so far lost the sense of proportion of observation and inference, that his philosophy, based on a series of incomplete inferences, is the criterion by which he accepts or rejects new observations. When written so it is absurd, but nevertheless it is true. Man shows indeed a fine conceit in his manner of regarding Nature. He sees some living thing, coloured and shaped in such a fashion as best to suit its needs, and he terms it beautiful, and when

Of Oily Patches

next he sees it he says, "How strange that it should be so beautiful," when he alone has named it so. It is Nature's products that have given us our standards of what we have called "beauty," but Nature gives to her children the attributes we so name and love for their life's needs, not for our delight.

Beautiful colours and graceful forms, as we would name them, are for the living thing the necessities of a function, just as are those that we name repulsive or disgusting. Some have pleased us, some have not, and those that tickle our child's delight, that please our æsthetic sense, we marvel at, and wonder at Nature supplying for our pleasure what are really the homely, functional necessities for the life processes of her children.

Come with me to the rocky barrier that keeps intact this tiny speck of land on which I live, and we will, in imagination, turn over one of those brown and sober rocks that lie scattered along the flats. If it were dull and brown before we turned it over, it is very different underneath. Crimson, scarlet, pink, and yellow nullipores ; purple and blue nudibranchs ; red and black corals ; worms, starfish, urchins of a dozen hues : all God's

sea-creatures hidden away like jewels in a casket. They are coloured because it is a necessity in their life functions, and not for the pleasure of little man.

While man regards himself with that distinguished aloofness from Nature he will seek the truth in vain. Not only must he forbear to say, "Thank God I am not as other men are," but he must also forget to thank God that he is different from God's other children. But such a train of thought leads far—far into the shockingly unorthodox, and there is yet another reality in connection with oily patches which has floated into my thoughts to-day.

At certain seasons of the year beautiful jelly-fish sail by unceasingly, and as I sit on the rocks fishing, they pass before me in review. Gently expanding and contracting, the merest clouds of life, shapes and colours almost immaterial, they float by on the surface, all bound in one direction, all beautiful and strange. There is a fascination in watching these almost spectre forms that to-day will be a vast army, and to-morrow will be vanished. As each one passes, one wonders at its beauty, until presently one more lovely comes along. With all the colours of the rainbow and a sheen as of

Of Oily Patches

taffeta, gently expanding, gently contracting, this new one floats along the surface. Surely this is more beautiful than all. Presently it floats to my feet, and instead of a wondrous and rare medusa, I see that it is a patch of oil from my neighbour's hook. Why does all its beauty fade when I know that it is oil, and not a strange medusa? Why does the appearance that seemed so lovely now cease to please? I do not know; but I am certain that the poet who would write whole verses to a butterfly's iridescent wing could not pen two lines to a floating patch of kerosene oil, though their appearance is very much the same.

XVII

Of Coral Islands and Clay pans

THERE is ever a danger in the trespass upon the intellectual preserves of specialists ; and I, for one, have little sympathy for the man who, without training and without special knowledge, makes some foolish inroad upon the territory so carefully cultivated by an army of men trained in their specialization, and precise in their own knowledge and the sources of their information. But though I heartily condemn the untrained intruder, and the only generally informed free-lance, I can readily find excuse for them.

A man may be trained to some special branch of science, and may thereby be said to have had an education which is introductory to all sciences ; and which, in his case, has become elaborated in a certain, and it maybe trivial, direction. Yet he may, as circumstances change, come into contact with problems which involve other specializations.

Of Coral Islands

Some new aspect of his inquiries may tempt a botanist to puzzle over astronomical problems. The man who studies toadstools may be arrested one day by seeing the moon in bright sunlight.

I do not study toadstools ; but in a circumstance of wonderful sunlight, and walking towards the east, I have seen the moon at noon, so that this ever-familiar object has become a new thing and a problem. What would I not give to abandon my present work, and start all over again in the hope that I might, one day, know more about the wonder that was suspended in the vast blue canopy, and seemed so much nearer and appeared so much more real, as a mass and an entity, than ever its shining image had been at night. But then comes the sobering reflection that it is all beyond me. Astronomers must be familiar with the signs and symbols of mathematics which are beyond the reach of most of us. Fortunately all things which are grand, sublime, and illuminating of the infinite are not beyond the understanding of the ordinary person. A mountain may be of wondrous height, and its ascent be possible only to the few ; yet all may view it. All are free to speculate upon

it. The very slope upon which its only conqueror lost his life may be within easy view of one who regards it from the veranda of his hotel.

So it is with other things. The philosophy of life and human passions, desires and prejudices, for example. We may live them through as an astronomer may live among the mathematical problems of the stars, and yet not realize them. Or we may have an understanding of them, which is far more.

All the emotions of all humanity lie at our front doors. We need understanding rather than participation to know, to realize, and to interpret them. The Brontë sisters, and a host of those who knew human life, rather than lived it, need not be called as witnesses. These things are common knowledge. For a philosopher all life lies near to his front door : he may sit on his step, or at the mouth of his barrel, and know all.

Now, astronomy has been instanced as a science in which none but the instructed may intrude : save for the trained astronomer, the subject is too vast ; it is represented by immensities unrealized by the uninitiated. But this does not apply to all sciences. I envy

Of Coral Islands

the man who regards the moon as a familiar object ; but I cannot enter with him into his understanding. Far more have I learned to envy the man who, looking at a coast-line, a mountain range, a valley or a river, sees its past history, knows what vicissitudes it has passed through, and, realizing the great earth changes of which it forms a part, can forecast what happenings the future has in store for it. That man I admire and I envy. But he is not so far removed from me as is the astronomer, for I have learned that, though no trivial circumstance can help me to understand the stars, some utterly trivial things may help me to understand the making of some of the grandest geological features.

A philosopher, as we have said, may see all life near to his front door. A very ordinary person may see great geological truths revealed in his front garden.

The Brontë sisters saw the germ of all human passions displayed within the narrow circle in which they lived, and from this narrow circle enlarged it so that it came to embrace the passions of all humanity. Few of us have seen the Grand Cañon of Colorado, as few of us have seen the play of love and hate as mani-

fested within the immediate circle of a throne. But all of us may see the Grand Cañon in miniature cut into the clay banks of the road on which we walk. Many is the time I have seen relief maps sculptured by a shower that are just as grand as the Grand Cañon itself. A shower and a clay bank can make a Grand Cañon for me ; a washerwoman and a cab-driver can reveal to me the emotions that sway monarchs ; but I know no triviality which may make the moon in full daylight any more easy of understanding.

Now, if we can see a vast river system made in miniature by a trickle of rain, is it not possible that other geological formations may find some sort of interpretation from the study of equally trivial circumstances.

If a stone happens to lie in the path of waves it forms an impediment to the onward sweep of the waves. This may be seen wherever a stone and wave-stirred water are to be met with. When the wave meets the stone, that part of the wave which is abreast of the stone is arrested, and on either side of the stone the wave moves on. Around the sides of the stone the wave streams forward ; it is bent as a bow at its point of impact, and passes on

Of Coral Islands

from the sides of the stone like the horns of the crescent moon. Long ago it was my lot to see a grander manifestation of this simple thing ; for, watching the spent waves, mere ripples of the broken barrier rollers, sweep over the wide barrier of Pulu Atas, I saw the crescents which they made around the great boulders with which the barrier is strewn. Of late I have seen it in one of its most splendid displays. On the main island of the Pearson's group, in the Great Australian Bight, there is a peak some eight hundred feet high. From this peak I have watched the huge crescentic waves, formed by the Southern Ocean rollers meeting with their first impediment on their journey to the southern shores of Australia.

Now, if the wave that meets the stone happens to be washing sediment along, then, instead of the familiar parallel ripple-marks made by waves on the sand of the open sea shore, ripple-marks that are bent as a bow will be produced. From the stone, the stream-lines of the wave will make sand-ridges which are curved—convex towards the side from which they came. In this way a boulder that is placed in the line of the waves will

develop, upon either side of it, crescentic sand-banks, which stretch from its extremities as horns of tailing sand. Suppose the boulder to be increased in size so that it forms a tiny island, then the deposited sand will be seen as the typical crescentic sand-spits which distinguish the extremities of the ordinary coral atoll islets. Suppose the whole thing to be magnified again—the typical crescentic form of the atoll which lies in the Trade-wind regions is arrived at. If for a part of the year the wind blows, and the waves roll, from one direction, and for another part of the year they come from the opposite direction, then for a time the building forces will be reversed, and the completed ring of a coral atoll which lies in the Monsoon regions is developed. The whole process is a simple one when watched from stage to stage. The single rock, the boulder mass, the islet, become in turn the centre from which horn-like banks of sediment are built in crescentic lines from either side of the obstacle. Later a crescentic island is made. Finally a crescentic group composed of crescentic islands.

So much for the building of the mysterious form of coral atolls.

Of Coral Islands

Suppose we take away the water and desiccate the whole picture—turn water into wind and sediment into the fine light sand of the desert ; what will happen now if we set things moving ? This thing I have watched a hundred times. I have seen it at work upon the pure white beaches of coral islands, followed it on a grander scale in the deserts of Nubia, and met it again and to more purpose in the “ dead heart of Australia.”

The wind is blowing across a vast open space : it encounters some impediment to its progress. As I have seen it many times of late, the impediment is a grinding-stone left behind long since by Australian aboriginals. When the wind strikes the grinding-stone it produces a very curious state of affairs. It may have swept over miles and miles of open country unimpeded : the grinding-stone forms an obstacle, the wind strikes it, and, just as the water streams around the rock, the wind streams around the grinding-stone. But there is this difference : the water which strikes the rock is impeded and drops its burden in crescentic lines, the wind which strikes the grinding-stone is impeded at the stone but streams along its sides as currents moving on the

particles of loose sand. It sculptures crescentic lines from the impediment instead of piling ridges from the impediment.

In this way, with a wind determined from one quarter for some time, the grinding-stone will have an ever-widening moat made about its windward side, and, as the wind shifts from day to day, the moat will gradually encircle its whole circumference, and in the end the stone will remain as an elevated and isolated testimony to the presence of a former camp. It is left standing on a little base in the midst of a roughly circular depression scoured all about it. I have instanced a grinding-stone, but the merest flint chip will serve the purpose ; and it is precisely because of this phenomenon that, after a blow, the stone culture of former generations of the aboriginals of Australia is so freely exposed to the collector. It is the commonest experience in the sandy country of the centre of Australia to see a whole camp site denuded of sand, scoured out to the basal consolidated surface upon which it was originally made, and laid bare just as it was left by the blacks of former days. From the trivial beginning of the process in the wind scouring around a single stone, to the complete

Of Coral Islands

denudation of a whole camp site, we are witnessing the action of one simple factor. The larger the obstacle, the grander will be the display of the process. Every one who has visited Central Australia must have seen a stunted Mulga bush, with its roots enmeshed in some firm base, standing alone resisting in the midst of a sand scour. The bush and its anchorage become the central object in a saucer-shaped depression from which all the sand is scoured. In the regions where the wind is sculpturing the sand in this way the sand is only a surface layer. Beneath the sand there is a firmer surface. The saucer-shaped depressions scoured about impediments to the wind are, therefore, denuded to a firm surface at the centre, and the rising sides are made of the general surface layer of sand. When the scoured depression has reached any considerable size it will fill with water when the rains come, and then it enters upon its second phase of development.

The finer particles of sand and dust form a soft oozy mud that lines and puddles the bottom of the saucer, and water will be held in the depression until removed by evaporation. When the hot dry weather comes the

water disappears, and the sun bakes the ooze into a hard shining clay as firm and smooth as asphalt. Upon this even shining surface the sand particles will not come to rest, and the whole formation is established on a permanent basis. The central obstacle which led to its formation may disappear, as a bush and its basis will when the saucer fills with the rains, or it may become trivial in the midst of the developing depression. Whatever happens, we have now definitely made a "claypan," and a claypan is a kind of negative monsoon atoll scoured in the desert sand instead of being built in the midst of the ocean. Claypans are of all sizes. They may be only a few paces across, or their area may be measured in square miles. They may be called claypans, or swamps, or lakes. They may be so small as to dry up almost as soon as they fill, or they may be so large as to be reckoned as permanent waters. They may receive no more water than falls directly upon their surface, or they may become the central depressions of a regular drainage system during the wet season, and then they rise to the temporary dignity of being inland seas having real, but temporary, rivers to feed them. Our little

depression has become a temporary puddle ; the puddle has become a claypan ; the claypan becomes the central reservoir of a vast, but temporary, drainage system. The thing is grown gigantic ; as gigantic as the wind and the grinding-stone seem trivial. It is only because it is grown gigantic that some may perhaps shrink from thinking it true, and most will shrink the more from believing that the vast picture of the topography of Central Australia is just a great system of gigantic claypans.

XVIII

Of the Devil and some of his Works

IT seems a strange thing that Satan should ever visit a lovely coral atoll that lies over six hundred miles from the nearest land ; yet it is certain that at times he comes, and of his coming he leaves the most visible signs. There are few ways in which the Devil may appeal to the coral islander, for life is so peaceful, and competition so limited—perhaps that is why, when he does come, he always leaves his mark behind. Satan may tempt the city dweller in a thousand ways, but he has reserved for the coral islander the shame of showing the physical effects of his kiss. The kiss of Satan is a brown stain upon the skin, a mark that looks half like a bruise, half like a mole, and which is not really either. There is no other thing in all the world that is like it. and there is no explanation for it—save that it is, as the islanders name it—the Chium Satan.

The Devil's kiss is a stigma, a spot of shame

Of the Devil

that marks out the recipient as one who has had traffic with the Evil One ; and though his kiss is bestowed in a moment, for several weeks the world may see the imprint of the unholy commerce.

Satan, as a rule, chooses the hours of darkness for his doings, and during sleep he pays his visit and he gives his kiss ; but on occasion he will come at the most unlikely times and select the most unlikely places, and this is true of all his works.

I have been kissed by Satan in the middle of a sunny Sunday afternoon, and I will tell you of this kiss, for though I own with shame that I have long been one of Satan's chosen ones, I have never before known so exactly when he visited me.

It was a hot day, and calm, and though there is not much on the coral ring that marks out Sundays from the other days in the week, still the day had that air of peace, of sunshine, and of rest, that the word " Sunday " always suggests to me. And I too felt like " Sunday," for I lay reading in a cane chair, and thinking when I did not read. The palms were hardly moving in the light breeze, the sky was fair, and the lagoon was of its most wonderful blue,

everything was bathed in sunshine ; there was nothing in time or place—or even in my thoughts—to suggest the evil presence : yet the Devil came, he kissed me, and he went.

He left behind him, on my right thumb, a most vivid imprint of his kiss, and for three weeks after his visit I must have it still plain for every one to see my shame. At three o'clock I washed my hands, and no stain of sin was there ; and yet by five o'clock, without my being aware of the presence of my spiritual adversary, the Devil's kiss was large and plain. In these two short hours my right thumb had changed from being an ordinary, rather large, and very tanned right thumb, to the extraordinary extent of having a big dark mole spread over its upper surface where the Devil's lips had been pressed.

Now all this is perfectly true, but I cannot explain it. I am certain that within the space of two hours, a thing like a freckle, over two inches long, came on my thumb, and I am certain that two weeks afterwards it was darker and more mole-like, and with three weeks gone by, it was as plain as ever. If it be not the imprint of an unholy kiss, then what is it ? It faded in its own time, but in the meanwhile

Of the Devil

Satan kissed the same part of my left thumb, and it was long before I could show my hands and not confess that the Devil had selected me as his own.

That I should have to bear the stigma of trafficking with the Devil might not perhaps seem unjust ; but it is a wicked thing that a mother must have her seven months old babe marked as the recipient of the kiss of Satan. It is an unholy deed that the Devil should stain with his deep brown mark of shame the plump arm of a child, and yet the first time I ever saw this mark it was as a dark patch upon a young baby.

There is no age exempt from the visitations of the Evil One, and if young babes are sinless, it must be only for the reason that they are powerless to sin, for it is certain that Satan visits them early ; it would be difficult for a little boy baby to do anything very wicked, but it was easy to see that at the early age of seven months he had at least been kissed by Satan.

To some philosophers—or to some who imagine themselves to be philosophers—it may be a satisfaction to know that women are more often than men chosen by the Devil to

be the victims of his advances ; and at times he shows a discrimination that is wonderfully human, for I have seen a woman kissed fair upon the lips. Above the red margin of her upper lip, and very large and dark, and very plain to see, was the stain where Satan had greeted her with a kiss that was not holy, and for weeks she must go among her fellows showing her stigma, and bearing living testimony to the Devil's good taste.

Why these stigmata come, or how they come, I do not know, but I know that they are very real and very strange ; and as I have no better explanation for their origin, I must accept that of those who have known them long, and to me the brown stain on my thumb must be the evidence of a visit, and a kiss, from Satan.

It is said in the islands that these things come more often when the victim is suffering from any trials or worries, and that, I think, is quite true. Yet I do not think that this removes the Chium Satan into the realm of the pathologically explainable, for I look on it only as evidence that Satan finds a more ready subject in one who is already undergoing some sort of strain.

I have less hesitation in owning up that these

Of the Devil

marks are Satan's work when I come to think of some of the other evidences of his evil doings in my islands. Satan does not always content himself with a mere kiss, and a sign of shame—he does not always limit himself to kissing the innocent babe—for he can blight a life and mis-shape a form ; and instead of a fine baby kissed by the Evil One is the unfortunate monstrosity. In the islands, when a baby is born, not in God's image, but as a poor distorted thing, the mother is not told an elaborate story of the unfolding of the human form, which will not help to heal her babe ; but if she does not already know of this thing she is simply told that it is the Devil's work. Now this makes things far more simple than the most modern teachings of science, for, after all, what will a lecture on embryology do towards restoring a mis-shapen human form ; and what cannot the Devil be made to do by strategy ?

The thing is in reality very simple : you accept the fact that the Devil has done this work, you must do your best to make him undo his mischief ; and he will undo it, if every one does the right thing. And what must be done is this : when a baby is born, and it

has some deformity, strategy must be resorted to, the Devil must be made to feel that his efforts are vain ; the poor mother must not take any notice of her babe, must not put him to her breast, must not even look at him, but he must be quickly covered from sight and put aside. The infant must be quite forgotten, and as for the mother she pretends that she has had no babe ; as for the midwife, that she has had no case. When some time has gone by, and no one has shown by word or deed that anything unusual, or anything in the least unpleasant, has taken place, then the babe is uncovered. If all have played their parts well, the child is lifted from its coverings with the Devil's work undone, and instead of the poor malformed thing, is the pink struggling promise of manhood with the strangely puckered face, the great chest, and the joints as the groove of string tied tight about strong limbs, and what mother would not take him then and love him ?

Now the explanation of these doings is simple. It is the mother's business to show that she does not intend to have anything to do with Satan's handiwork, she will not recognize it, she really does not own that she has

Of the Devil

ever had a baby and certainly does not care. And the Devil sees that his cunning is likely to be wasted, and in despair he undoes his mischief, for he would rather not own that he had tried at all, than confess that he had tried and failed, and so would the mother.

These things sound strange, but they are strongly believed in, and they succeed. I know a little boy whose head to-day is as good a head as little boys' heads ever are, and yet when he was born, his mother saw with horror that it bore at the sides of it two horns like those of Satan, and bigger than eggs. But she knew the cause of all this, and she knew the remedy ; and whilst she talked of the weather to the Malay women with her, and remarked on the extraordinary abundance of coco-nuts and mosquitoes for June, the Devil saw his failure and took the horns right away.

And so you see that though my little home is so small and so remote, it has not escaped altogether from the visitation of evil, but I think that as a field for Satan's handiwork it must be very limited. Where life is simple, where even enterprise is an absurdity, and competition is a folly, then Satan can find but little to his hand. Ideas, ideals, ambitions,

and even the human vocabulary, are reduced to a minimum amongst those who are born, who live and die, on coral islands. In my little world, where only a tiny portion of all those myriad objects and aims of the outer world are ever seen or heard, the very lowest ebb of human intellect is sufficient to grasp the whole of life, and that life may be very simple and very good.

Where money is unknown, and the coco-palm supplies nearly all your wants, you must be but a poor prey for any foe, and that is why Satan must needs mark us with his seal and stamp on the frame of the infant the sign of his power in the coral islands.

But at least we have learned what the great striving outer world does not know, for we can make Satan right his wrongs, we can make him undo the mischief that he would do to the coral island baby.

Of Opals, and Sneezing

BEFORE the war, and, no matter if it seems incredible, there *was* a time before the war. Before the war, there was a place of amusement known as the White City. For months on end during the war it was my lot to gaze daily on the ruins. During the war it was no pleasure city.

My first visit to the White City in its pre-war prime was one of pure delight. Not that I greatly admired the whole rococco structure of it, nor the depressingly ephemeral suggestion of its existence ; but for me large white expanses in the sunshine have always been an incentive to sneeze. It was near the massively white hall of the Arts, or of Machinery, or of Science, I forget which, that I had the most massively satisfying sneeze that I have ever had. Looking at the ruins of the whole wonderful structure as I saw them during the war I have sometimes wondered

if that sneeze led to their decrepitude. It was a great sneeze—one to clear the head. Many times I revisited the White City in sunlight and sneezed ; but they were ordinary sunlight sneezes, and trivial compared to this one outside the Hall of the Fine Arts.

I cannot tell why sneezing is associated in me with sunlight reflected from white surfaces, but so it is. I have always had a liking for white hoardings, and have rather resented the customary threat to bill-stickers, since there are not many hoardings in London which have not on some sunny day afforded me a sneeze.

But hoardings—and even the Hall of the Fine Arts—paled when the white coral sands became my home. There on the white coral sands and in the dancing sunlight a man must be a dullard who could not sneeze to satisfaction in better style than a snuff-taker. Than to wake in the morning and go to the veranda and, paying regard to the coral beach and the glinting sun on the lagoon, to sneeze oneself awake and to life, there is little better.

I have known a man who daily on waking went into the sun, and with every appearance of system and a ritual, scratched himself methodically, and at length became serviceable

Of Opals and Sneezing

and fit for a new day. But to scratch oneself awake in the sun is a poor thing. The way a man should start upon a fresh day's adventure is to sneeze himself awake in the early morning light: not the sneeze of a cold or a draught, not the sneeze of damp places or unaired bed linen, not the rheum chilly sneeze of mist-sodden dawn, but the sneeze of the dazzle of a new day reflected from bright, clean, clear, white sand.

All sorts of places have their special attraction. Waikiki has its surf-riding; Waitati has its flounders; but a coral island has its early morning sneezes, than which there is little better to be had.

We have in our schools a variety of men who teach of the functions of the human body, but no one of them has ever told me to my satisfaction why one should sneeze with the early morning glint of the sun over the white beach of a coral island. "I saw that island first," says Stevenson of Falasea, "when it was neither night nor morning" (how often have I seen my island thus), "and the chill of it set me sneezing." It may have been the chill of it, I would not dispute it—but no chill of sunrise on a coral island ever gave me this

delight : it was the glint " of the dawn which was all pink " which always set me sneezing.

Since leaving my coral island and my matutinal sneeze, I have wandered far. True, I have had my morning sneeze on occasion from hoardings, white buildings, white cliffs, white beaches, or what-not, but only of late have I found another environment where an early morning sneeze is to be had every day of the week.

The journey to this place is a long and tiresome one. Four hundred and eighty miles of railway is the first stage to the north, and when the rail is left behind another hundred and eighty miles of blue bush, salt bush, sand-hills and gibber table-lands remain. It is at the blue bush that the real travelling begins, and though in these days the journey is done in a motor-car, it is still somewhat of an adventure for the town dweller. Mile upon mile of open table-land is crossed, and during the second day's journey a feeling of hopelessness is difficult to shake off. It seems quite possible that we might drive straight ahead day in day out for the rest of our lives and still there would be one blue bush rise succeeding another with depressing regularity. As the

sun is going down on the second day of motor-ing, the first real break comes, and it comes suddenly. Just in the red glow of the sunset on the right of our track some jagged hills appear as though made by some trick of light from the setting sun. The hills spring into sight and disappear: disappear as hills, and reveal themselves as the distant edge of a great depression in the table-land to the near edge of which we are approaching. Although on maps this place is known as the Stuart Ranges, it is altogether unlike any picture of ranges that I had ever conjured up. The arresting feature of the place is not the elevation of the table-land into a range, but the great hole in the table-land that makes the edges of the hole appear as hills. It seems as though for miles the floor had dropped down from the plateau, as though some great disturbance had let a whole mass of the range sink as a great level crater.

Over the edge and into the crater the car descends, and we are in a new world—the world of Coober Pedy. It seems a strangely uninhabited world, for though the handiwork of man is to be seen all round, there are no houses, no huts, no tents. Although it is the

hour for preparing the evening meal, no smoking chimneys are to be seen : there are no camp-fires ; but from a small hole in a near-by hill a thin wreath of smoke is issuing. In dropping from the plateau to the plain we have passed from the ordinary world where men live in houses, to a strange world where men live in holes in the ground. Truly the place is inhabited, but the inhabitants are as little in evidence as the rabbits of a warren are at noon. But with us come the mails and the stores, and presently from one unexpected hole and another men emerge, the warren wakes up, and Coober Pedy gives up its troglodytes. Although these men have come out of holes, it must not be thought that they are suffering hardships in living in pits, for the reason that houses are not to be had in this place. The holes from which they come lead into regular houses, houses with several rooms, houses with kitchens fitted with cooking stoves and with bedrooms and store-rooms, and with a deal of simple comfort. In most places men build houses and adorn the walls with their treasures ; in Coober Pedy men cut their houses into hill-sides and find their treasures in the making of the walls.

Of Opals and Sneezing

The dugout which is assigned to us has three compartments in the main part and a separate and well-fitted kitchen opening from its own entrance on the hill-side. We have beds to sleep on, hooks on which to hang our clothes, and a well-made door at the entrance. And when the candles are lit for the first evening's meal the reason of it all is plain. Running along one wall is a narrow strip of ever-changing light, a bright unnatural-looking thing to see in this dark place. Small pick marks on the wall show that this little strip of light has been sought out and followed ; but it is a strip no wider than a wooden match—else would the room have been larger. The little strip of light which glows so curiously in the candle-light is a thin vein of opal. Opal, wonderful, mysterious, precious opal : a thing which seems so essentially a child of the light, this is what is buried away beneath the hills and the valley floor of Coober Pedy. That is why men cut spacious houses into the hill-sides and sink holes all over the surface of the valley ; that is why in Coober Pedy a man will sit down to play cards with a wad of notes to the amount of two thousand pounds sterling in his hip pocket. That is why the little community

rules itself, and is a voluntary prohibition area. Prisoned beneath the valley floor is dancing sunlight, which when caught may make a man rich by a day's toil. The first essential in a small community, situated nearly five hundred miles from the State capital, where a particularly portable form of wealth may suddenly come to one man, and never to another, is that the community shall be sober and law-abiding. As many as four hundred men have been on the field at one time, and thousands of pounds' worth of precious opal has been found ; but the record of the field is a striking one. A man were safer with his bag of opal on the Stuart Ranges than in the best-reputed and the best-policed of cities. To-day there are but forty or fifty men and one woman all told. There are men who have worked here for years and still cannot pay the fare to return to civilization ; and there are men whose sojourn is no more than a few weeks, and who have opals to the value of several thousand pounds accessible to any visitor to their dugouts.

Than digging for opals no more attractive pursuit could be found for the gambler. He may dig a hole in which to place the peg for

Of Opals and Sneezing

marking out his claim and the pick strike opal worth forty shillings an ounce. He may dig like a mole, day in day out, for years and get no more than "potch"—the milky, worthless stone in which the fire is seen dimly as though through a mist. One man, a man who had the gambling spirit as well developed as ever I have seen it, had found opal almost every day, and everywhere he dug or drilled, and he, I noted, had a gap between his two upper central incisors. Another man—an old Londoner who once made pills in Bermondsey—was hard put to it after years of work to buy sufficient fresh food to keep in check the "Barcoo rot," which caused the healing of every accidental abrasion of his skin to be a lingering and uncertain affair. A former bank manager, who hailed from Oxford and whose voice proclaimed him stranger in that place, had failed to grow rich on opal digging or on keeping the local store; but with him I think there was another factor than the mere ill-luck of the pill maker.

Of the whole community of opal diggers there was not one ordinary or uninteresting man. There are queer men who hunt beetles, there are strange fellows who prefer mummies

to music halls, and interesting men who gather seaweeds, postage stamps, or some quaint or unusual breed of canaries or carnations ; but they are a dull set of dabblers compared with the little band of individualities attracted by the gamble of the most tantalizing pursuit of opal digging.

But this is no dissertation of opals or of opal diggers. In Coober Pedy one lives in a dug-out. On a morning when coming from the dark interior, you look towards the white dumps of the opal diggers, where beautiful white limestone and flashing crystals of gypsum are glinting in the early morning sun ; and if a better sneeze than the early morning sneeze of Coober Pedy is to be had, I, for one, have not had it.

Of Longing

IN those early days in which Latin is taught to the small boy, it is not as a rule done with the idea that some all-consuming desire for a knowledge of the dead tongue is being satisfied. It would be a mistake to suppose that the kindly master insisted on the acquiring, on the part of the small boy, of facts concerning the horse soldiers and the foot soldiers depicted in unreal and stilted phrases, merely because he thought that the small boy longed to know of these things. The whole method of the teaching shows the small boy this, for if he really wanted to learn the language he certainly would not set about it after the abstruse and archaic fashion of the master,—even the master himself would not. It would be a pretty thing to hear the philosopher discuss the reason of the neophyte of Latin being deluged with hostages, with tables, and with foot soldiers, when the elements of another tongue are

always instilled by means of the "pens, ink, and paper of the wife of the gardener." Only one really homely phrase in Roman speech ever clings to the small boy, and that one does so for the reason that it was probably the cause of much unhappiness to him, and it is small satisfaction to him that he knows quite well that the statement which that sentence would impress upon him is hopelessly untrue. It is a mean thing to entrap the small boy with the vagaries of translating the bald assertion that "Of all animals the mouse is the smallest," when the gravest errors of syntax he can commit upon it will not be more wildly inaccurate than the statement itself,—and the small boy knows it. I would have every boy at school realize that this deplorable sentence, which the master accepts as true, and the trivial mole-hills in its mis-translation of which he makes his mountains, are just and true Plimsoll marks of the feeble cerebration, and distorted outlook on Nature, that the average schoolmaster possesses. He will freely give an imposition for "minimus," while he swallows at a gulp a biological inaccuracy that would undermine the entire structure of zoological knowledge.

Now, I would suggest that a sentence that

Of Longing

is true, and that teaches the small boy some real, philosophic, and pregnant fact, should be substituted for the mouse fallacy, and I propose that he should be taught to translate the great axiom that "Of all animals man is the most uncomfortable." For it is true, man *is* the most uncomfortable animal.

When you go to the Zoo you are sure, sooner or later, to come across the little sharp-nosed animal that peeps up from a bundle of straw, and which, after some nosing about and much blinking, starts to trot round his cage with a sort of never-ending restless shuffle. He will try every bar, every corner, every crack in the floor, and he will twitch the pointed end of his snout from side to side just to see if there is not something new about the place. You will be tempted to say to yourself that here, at last, is an animal more uncomfortable than man—he seems to worry more. But it is not really so : it is only that the little sharp-nosed beast is out of place—there is some place that fits him perfectly, and if he were there he would not worry a bit, and he would not shuffle about all day and blink and twitch his nose.

Now there is no place where man fits in, and it is all because he has lost his touch with

Unscientific Essays

Nature, and has arrived at the deplorable pass of being an animal with no natural environment. If there were any place where man should find himself in a fitting habitat, one would suppose it would be in the surroundings of his own making—his great cities : that would be the biological expectation concerning man, and yet anyone may see that it is not fulfilled. Very like the little sharp-nosed animal are most of the dwellers in great cities, they hurry and they blink, they search for something—anything—new ; and did not their long isolation from the rest of the animal world forbid it, they would twitch their noses in the search. If the shuffling, hurrying dwellers in the great cities where white men dwell be watched as they blink to and fro—though it is long, thank Heaven, since I watched them—one-half of the swarm will look as though were they touched suddenly they would jump ; and the other half as though they could not jump, even though they were kicked to do it.

It may be to the comfort of mankind to know that it is in reality that which is best in man that makes him uncomfortable—it is his ideals that cause him to be like the sharp-nosed animal. Even the man who fondly

Of Longing

clings to the silk hat and frock coat still has this of the rebel in him, that at times he feels a longing to roll in the grass and again to be in touch with Nature. To one who observes the life around him it would seem that the tendency to echo this kinship with Nature in the artificial covering which man adopts for himself, is on the increase : more men are willing to express their response to the rebel call of Nature to-day than formerly. Woman has been ever ready and sympathetic ; she has always been bound with tighter bonds to her surroundings in Nature, and from the modern hat to the more archaic decoration of *Ficus carica* she has shown it.

To every one it comes at one time or another, this call of Nature—the longing for the wilds, and the elemental desire to fit once again into some real gap in the outdoor scheme. It is this call that leads to the being of that truest of all Nature's aristocrats—the incorrigible tramp—the true nomadic vagabond who wanders always with the sights, the sounds, and the smells of the wonder-garden fresh for his delight : it is this influence that, just as it makes him fit into the great scheme, turns inevitably the coat he wears from the

dreadful black that harmonizes with nothing to the rusty green that Nature loves.

Nature does her best even with the most unpromising material, and to the philosopher no sight can be more beautiful than that of a suit of dress clothes, propped stiffly in a field, yet so transformed by the magic hand of Nature as to be an object of affection even to the birds it was meant to scare away.

It is the spring that makes most rebels even in the heart of civilization ; it is then that the feeling of hopeless incongruity of the modern human animal with Nature drives woman to spring-cleaning, and for man increases the statistics of suicide.

The cynic has said that spring is the time when birds sing, flowers bloom, and mankind takes saline medicines ; but with more force, yet little poetry, the scientist proclaims that "in the season of the year in which the earth is in aphelion the average proportion of suicides reaches its maximum limit." Spring suicides, like legendary heroes, die for an ideal : it is the longing that kills, and the bullet, the rope, or the drug are merely artificial aids. Death from longing should be the verdict. With us this longing for other things is a fitful and

Of Longing

seasonal thing, yet it is sufficiently real to permit some appreciation of the degree to which it can be carried in other races.

With us it is only the inmates of lunatic asylums who display that extraordinary characteristic possessed by most Asiatic races—the power of concentrating every thought upon some dominant idea. In the uneventful round of life which the Malay dweller on low islands leads, this strange power of concentration upon an ideal often makes itself felt. It is a thing always to be reckoned with. A Malay has an enemy, and he longs for his foe to be in his power ; he goes to the jungle alone, and living in solitude he thinks of the fight ; he imagines his enemy dead ; soon he pictures himself as the inevitable victor, and on the strength of a much-imagined invulnerability he goes back to fight his foe, no matter what may be the chances against his success. A Malay has a grievance, real or imagined, and he sits apart with all his mind fixed on the subject of his wrong ; he broods, and when he broods he should be shut up or knocked on the head, for the next stage is *amok*. Or again, he has a longing for his native land, for the Nature scenes he loves,

and he mopes with every thought fixed on one picture—he is “*m'rindu*.” A man who is *m'rindu* sits apart and pines, and it is difficult for the European to realize the intensity of the desire that leads a man to have no interest in the present, to live entirely on a memory of the past and a dream of the future ; and to die, with his great longing for his only cause of death. The Malay does not need the bullet or the rope, for the longing is strong enough to kill. There are many things for which a man may long : even we of the Roman-ruled world know what it is to hunger after something that we wish above all others to attain, but of the myriad desires with which civilization may fill a man, it would not be just to use the word “*rindu*.” It must be an intense longing and a holy longing, and in all the world there are but two things—a man's native land, and a man's women-folk—that can properly cause him to be *m'rindu* ; when he wishes, ever wishes, that once again they should be to him his own. If you think that the translation of the word is not easily rendered, and if its definition though diffuse is strangely limited, I think it some consolation that a like difficulty should be properly encoun-

Of Longing

tered even in dealing with such a commonly used, and misused, word as "love." It is not a wonderful thing that a man whose every early impression was stamped upon him amongst the Java hills, should long once again to gaze upon something more majestic than the coral ridge piled ten feet high that makes the mountains of my island. It is not a wonderful thing that a man who left behind him everything he loved when he parted from the stately, fair-complexioned women of the Java uplands, should madly long to be again their lord—their slave. But it is hard for us to picture the intensity of the supreme longing that surely kills a man. For those born in the island there is no *m'rindu* till they go elsewhere, and then the crash of the barrier surf, the waving palm, and the white-edged lagoon of wondrous blue that dances in the sunlight, call him always ; the brown-skinned girls that move with swinging bodies and elastic step haunt him ever, and beckon to him across six hundred miles of ocean. But for the natives of the Archipelago who come to the coral ring, there is always the threat that the *rindu* of the jungle and the hill, of the maiden and the mother, will prove stronger than the

man's desire to live. A man who is *m'rindu* is spoken of much as one who has the measles—but a very fatal form of measles : he has a definite disease, and for him there is no recovery save in the fulfilment of his longings ; there is no medicine save the sight of his homeland and his love, and to withhold the simple remedy is to cause his death. It is no fable, this *m'rindu*, it is no myth of an Eastern race, for even a Malay coolie will surely die when the *rindu* of his sacred things is fairly settled upon him ; he will mope apart and give no heed to what goes on around him, he will pine away with his longing to a certain death. In the coral ring it is the accepted order of things that when the gloom of *rindu* has a man fairly within its grasp, then he must go ; he must gaze again upon his jungles and his women and be cured, for it were better for a man to have beriberi than to be *m'rindu*. If chance should ever throw across your path that person to whom all men not white are savages, who supposes that high ideals and worthy emotions are the monopoly of the “cultured” Western, and who, in his great bounty, allots the instincts and the actions of naughty children to his brown brothers, will you tell him of *m'rindu* ?

Of Longing

Tell him of the man who, when separated from those things that the Western himself cherishes, will dream his dreams and die a-dreaming.

Although one-half of all the world will never kick over the traces of disciplined thought that comes to it from its old-time Roman masters, still it is a happy thing for it that it still reads the book in which much of the idealism properly belongs to the un-Roman East, and if the picture of the isolated man who dies because he is *m'rindu* is foreign to our forms of thought, it nevertheless is one of the outlines which are repeatedly drawn with varying degrees of vividness in many sacred legends. It is a picture, too, that every white man who comes into contact with the Malay should realize, for nothing but respect should be paid to the nature that is capable of such deep-seated love for all that is most worthy. It would have been to the advantage of at least one European nation if it had grasped the fact that a race of men whose emotions are so real, would surely be a race hard to subdue, and difficult to tear from its own.

Of Sights and Scents

SLOWLY he turned the handle, opened the great creaking door and, after a moment of dread hesitation, glanced into the long, deserted room. But the first fearful glance brought him to a standstill. Pale and trembling he paused upon the threshold, not daring to advance another step, and yet unwilling to retreat, for there upon the opposite wall, and surrounded by a massive antique frame, was the face that had haunted his dreams so long. The face of a woman, no longer young, but beautiful beyond belief. Beautiful, till one noticed that little lurking line that marred the curved and dimpled symmetry of the mouth ; beautiful, till one noted the latent tiger-like cruelty that lurked somewhere behind those lovely eyes. A flood of childhood's memories overwhelmed him. A thousand incidents returned to his fevered mind like the throb of ocean restlessly whelming onwards. . . .

Of Sights and Scents

All that we know quite well. It is mostly told in better style, and has been told of a variety of objects : the mother who catches sight of the little childish shoe in some long unopened drawer ; the old blackguard who softens, and opens a floodgate for wearying memories at the sight of some crushed piece of ball-room finery. They never tire of telling us of the memories evoked by the chance sight of some trivial object long hidden from view. And it is all quite true. It is a great many years since last I saw a tin of knife-powder on which was a portrait of the Duke of Wellington ; but even to bring it back as a mental picture is enough to awaken other pictures : pictures of the boot boy's shed, of Alfred in his apron, and the details of the ledge on which his working outfit was stowed. It was a remarkable thing about the knife-powder and knife-boards, that the boards were always made with a hole at one end by which they might be hung up. Probably the men who made the powder also made the boards, so that whenever the board was hung up the powder fell off and more was needed. It is more than thirty years since I last saw the boot boy's shed, but in the dark I could still

lay my hand on the tin which bears the Iron Duke's portrait ; I could still find the bottle of boot-blackening in the mouth of which there stuck a piece of firewood.

Sight is, in truth, a wondrous memory sense. We may shut our eyes and live in scenes, every trivial detail of which fits into its proper place. Upon a coral island I have walked down Oxford Street and never missed a shop, nor faltered over a shop window in the whole pilgrimage. In London I have been the round of a Nubian graveyard, and known the excavated contents of every numbered grave in the whole limit of it.

But we have a strange rival to sight as a memory sense, and this one I would recommend to our popular writers. The transition is simple ; the possibilities even more dramatic. . . . Slowly he turned the handle, opened the great creaking door, and started back aghast. A flood of memories overwhelmed him : he saw again the patient Semite bent double with suffering, the hurrying porters, the white-coated dressers, the clean-cuffed nurses ; there was no doubting its dread import—the faint odour which was wafted to his nostrils was that of iodoform. . . .

Of Sights and Scents

That is a crude example, and one not suited to artistic ends ; but consider lavender and potpourri—or for higher flights, ambergris. Truly smell memories are all as wonderful as sight memories. For every one there is some faint, subtile, undefinable scent which can bring back whole scenes, whole periods of life, joyous or sad, and recall pictures difficult to evoke in the absence of the odour itself. There must be many people to whom pictures of discomfort, of a heavy furniture van and aproned men struggling with wardrobes in the sad drizzle of a grey London street, are brought back by the strange scent of the peculiar wrapping material used for these occasions. But this is a well-defined scent, as are the scents of damp seaweed, peat fires, or pine-woods. It is the indescribable, undefinable scents which are so wonderful for their memory power. ~~They~~ are being shown over the house, the angry and rather over-anxious lady with the white apron has left till last the “best” room, the sitting-room, the one with the south aspect and overlooking the sea, or the park, or what-not. She ushers you to the door, and as it opens, and you, hat in hand, prepare to enter, its whole contents are on a sudden revealed to you from

without. A faint indescribable odour has met you with the opening of the door. No one may describe or name the source of that faint odour ; but anyone who appreciates it may depict the room without entering. Facing you as you go in is the sideboard, a complex ornamental thing with a stuffed bird, or wax fruit under a glass shade in pride of place upon it. There is an engraving of a small girl and a large dog on the wall on the left, there are brackets in tiers tucked into the corners, with corded work upon their edges and glass and china eccentricities upon their shelves. There are chairs with antimacassars and a fire-screen and a curious clock—also under a glass shade—and a hairy rug and a footstool—and a host of other things.

A subtle scent, briefly caught, can give you a complete inventory, and here is a marvel for you. That a dog will thrust his nose down a rabbit hole and, giving one comprehensive sniff, know if the rabbit is at home or not, seems a very wonderful thing. That he will put his nose under the crack of the door and tell if his master is within the room seems still more surprising. Yet when we come to examine the complexity of the organ of smell

Of Sights and Scents

in a dog, and when we see how much of his brain is devoted to this sensation, the marvel appears the less.

When calms have so far settled down upon the doldrums that no breath of air is to be felt, old sailing captains will lick their first finger, and, holding it aloft, detect upon the wet surface the direction of the least movement of the air. When mammals first arose and lived their lives in close contact with the ground, the sense of smell was an all-important one, and wet noses were the order of the day. Though the mammal were densely clothed with his characteristic hair, his nose remained naked still, and the naked surface was kept moist for the same reason that the sailing captain licks his finger. We would therefore expect that the wet-nosed dog was an animal to which the sense of smell was all important. We can appreciate why the wet-nosed dog is a scent-hunter, whereas the dry-nosed cat is a sight-hunter; and no one has seen his pet cat smell out his presence by sniffing under the door. Normally, we may say that man is a dry-nosed animal; but we must remember that when the human child weeps it has to sniffle in order to prevent the tears running

out of its nose and thereby reverting to the condition typical of the lower mammalia. Not only is man a dry-nosed animal, but every part of his sense organ of smell, and every part of his cerebral mechanism for dealing with smell impressions, are in a sadly degenerate condition. Indeed, were a man to be intelligently dissected by a dog, it is doubtful if he would be credited with the possession of any very real olfactory function. He would probably be credited with very little ability to remember, associate, and correlate olfactory impressions, so little of his cerebral cortex being connected with this sense. Compared with the area of cerebral cortex associated with the sense of vision, the olfactory cortex is a mere ridiculous rudiment. But what a rudiment for function. Even though our sense organ is degenerate and our sense of smell is extremely ill-developed, look what a useful use can be made of that little which we learn with the aid of our noses.

When we consider the vast store of associated smell memories laid down in the cells of the olfactory cortex of the average individual, we seem almost in danger of overtaxing the possibilities of that very limited field. I feel certain that no dog, were he turned anatomist, would

Of Sights and Scents

credit me with my complex smell memories and associations, and that behoves me to be more careful how I deny him some things which I possess, but for which I cannot find in him great evidences of anatomical specialization. The human anatomist has boldly stated that "man alone can consider two opposite courses of action and deliberately choose the one and reject the other." But if the dog will grant me my smell memories and my smell associations I will grant him the power to deliberately choose one course of action and reject the other.

Of Argument

UPON the coral, life goes smoothly. We have few ups and downs ; it is not upon a coral island that a man sleeps humble and obscure and wakes to fame. As it was yesterday, so will be our life and our fame to-morrow ; each day may bring its luck, good or ill, but at the end of it we will be but little better or worse, perhaps a little happier or a little more sad, certainly no richer or poorer. All the big emotions of failure or success have to the outside world, and they are no more real to me to-day than when, as a small boy, I watched the telegraph wires from the window of the railway train. I wonder how many small boys have watched these telegraph wires, how many have felt the hopeless futility of it all. Luckily, not every small boy translates the doings of the telegraph wires into the terms of real life, or there would

Of Argument

be few who would care to try the chances of it all.

It is long since I travelled in a railway train, but I can see now the passing undulations of the wires, as most people can surely see them in their memories. As you look from the window, the wires catch your eye, for some distance they run level, but soon they mount up and up, till presently the pole flashes into view, and then one and all trend down again.

Again and again it is repeated ; success seems to be waiting always on the telegraph wire ; surely, one day it will be able to go up and up and not have to come down again. But the certainty of this check and fall becomes wearying to watch. Is all life like this ? will the pole always come when we think the ascent is easy and assured ? I have seen the occasion, seen them succeed, but I have always been with sadness, even in their success ; for when the longed-for rise becomes unbroken they pass altogether away and are seen no more. I think they do this when they cross the line ; but still it is a depressing passage, and one easily woven into a bad omen upon a gloomy railway journey.

Unscientific Essays

Her h musings are only the products of memory; for us there is no rising up to be ~~down~~, and we cannot even be reminded of the existence of such things, for our telegraph wires run bedded on the ocean ooze.

Sir is the order of our unambitioned days, be asked, What takes the place of all those things about which the world concerns itself so much? What takes the place of the hungering for honours? what is the substitute for competition? And the answer is easy to give: argument. Argument is the ambition, the hobby, and the disease of men in solitude. Even the man who ordinarily has but few definite opinions may in solitude become affected with this vice, and who has a strong leaning towards debauchery never be allowed to come where only three are gathered together in isolation. The man who shows a marked individuality in the methods of table usage or of mastication, the man for whose expression of mirth the word "laughter" is totally inadequate, even the man who misuses a musical instrument—all these may, with time and toleration, become very dear companions

Of Argument

in solitude. But time and solitude will only add to the uncompanionable horrors of the argumentative man. Before you are to live upon a coral island you should learn to know the man in whom loneliness may develop a morbid craving for debate. There are many types. If the complaint is mild he may merely invite you to bet upon the number of pips in an unopened mangosteen ; and when the season for mangosteens is passed, or in islands such as these where the fruit will not grow, he may be quite a good fellow. But the man who reads *Whitaker's Almanack* for half an hour before he sits down to dinner is incurable, is to be shunned as long as he lives.

Just as abundant social intercourse begets inconsequent small talk, so does the lack of trafficking with one's fellows give rise to consequential discussion and heretofore silent. This truth I learned early.

Once on a time in a far-away port I was greeted in friendship by a stranger—a stranger in all things save that the four walls within which he learned his craft had afterwards held me during my apprenticeship. His ship was to be alongside all day, and I was to lunch with him on board. There was something

insistent in his invitation, and I accepted it. I think that there were eight men in that mess; I am sure there were no passengers, for she tramped long spells of ocean, and her stay in port was but a brief pause in which the throb of engines was changed to the clank and rattle of winch and derrick.

Somehow as we sat down to lunch I noticed an air—artificial and restrained—a studied moderation of phrase and an unnatural attention to the details of politeness about the members of this mess. I was reminded of the atmosphere which pervaded the mixed inhabitants of a large cage which, under the care of an old man, used to pass as a “happy family” upon the parade at Brighton. Here the mice, the birds—even the cats conducted themselves with a nice niceness; for with each was the display of more naturalness than to replace this cultivated propriety, the resulting flare-up would be destructive of the welfare of the whole party. It was so with this mess.

The passage of preliminary drinks did nothing to efface the feeling. Tension lingered with the soup. With the advent of the fish, the manifest uneasiness of the “First”—who

Of Argument

was a Scotsman—definitely increased, and long before full justice had been done to a discussion of the shortcomings of an erratic monsoon, he could restrain himself no longer. “Can you tell us, sir, who was Salome?” With a determined eagerness he fired his question at me; the bolt had fallen. A clink of cutlery momentarily ungrasped, and the starting of the First as the nearest of his fellows found his shins beneath the table told how portentous, and yet how fated, was the falling of the bolt.

There was no denying that appeal, so direct was it: no chance to turn aside the question or even to quibble in the answering of it. The dance, the charger—the details of its burden and the plot which brought it there, these must all be recounted. But the end of the recital was not good. The tone of the Old Man, of the Second, and the Third was too openly expressed; the almost scornful antagonism of the First too ill-concealed. My statement was not to go unchallenged. “How do you know that?” said the mate, and the question seemed to be familiar to his fellows. I had no doubt of the strength of my position in appealing to the authority of the Bible. It

was then I learned what argument means to lonely men, for upon the instant two members of that mess produced Bibles from their pockets. I was told that I was quite wrong ; only one Salome was mentioned by name in Holy Writ, and she was a very different person. I believe that the First was correct, and I was merely recalling a picture in the Academy or some other association ; but I know I left an unsatisfied and still discordant set of men when, after lunch, I went ashore again.

Down in the islands these things are worse, for there the settlement of discussion is hard to arrive at, and friendship may be broken forever before an argument can be decided. I have known the cable invoked, and a continent two thousand miles away appealed to because the opinion of the exact age of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was threatening to break the calm of colonial days. But all arguments are not to be settled in this way, for it is useless to ask the man at the other end of the cable to determine, to the satisfaction of a very mixed mess, if Scotland was ever conquered by the English, or if some prominent politician was in fact a patriot or a traitor.

Once in three months we are visited by a

Of Argument

ship, and it is her crew which must sit as Court of Appeal upon most of our discussions.

Some one on board is almost certain to know if it is Oxford or Cambridge that has won the boat race the greater number of times, or some one will have a book in which the record for the long jump may be found. Then when one has been proved wrong and another right, and the stakes—as an ordered array of bottles—have changed hands, the ship sails away, and we are free to enter upon another spell of solitude and argument.

To the outside world these things sound trivial and childish, but to those who are real. I have known men who have gone great lengths in enmity because they differed in their opinions as to the right of privately owned yachts to fly the blue ensign. I have seen a coral island dinner party end in anger because no agreement could be come to regarding the proper spelling of the word "trousers." Unfriendly days have resulted from a discussion upon the reason for building the Tower of Babel. The leading biblical authority ruled that it was built to be a vantage ground from which to see the Promised Land, and this belief held current for long. It was

opposed seriously only by the view that the tower was to be a refuge in case there was another flood, but the author of this theory finally confessed that he was mixing it up with a building that he had seen from the railway somewhere near Chatham. In the end I believe that both of these ideas proved wrong, but I forget how their undoing was brought about.

In coral island arguments it is not always the correct opinion that carries the day. Maybe this is no peculiarity of discussions waged in far-away places, but at least the frequent opinion of the majority is one of their features. It is the opinion given with an air of authority that is like to hold its own.

By this method I have become possessed of a bottle of Benedictine. Why the letters D.O.M. printed on the label was a question that I did not state the mess. No solution was forthcoming. The bottle itself was at stake. I was late for dinner, but not too late to escape the inevitable question. A memory of the monkish origin of the liqueur dictated the very definite and very simple explanation that it meant Dominican Order of Monks. There was no opposition, the bottle became

Of Argument

my property, but I have learned since that my solution was not the correct one.

Even those who are born upon the coral suffer from these little weaknesses. Some time ago one of the younger men had fared to an outlandish port, and upon his return he told of a ship which was made, not of proper wood as ships were wont to be, but of massive iron. Here was a story indeed. And the adventurer claimed to have seen this unnatural thing, to have examined it, and to have scraped with his knife the paint from the solid metal of her hull. This was no ordinary mariner's tale. Long usage had brought credence towards the accounts of gales and terrible storms; but here was something different—for as was the blade of his knife so was the hull of that ship, and there was nothing shaking his faith in it. Some believed, some did not, and the question was put before the island community into hostile factions. The elders met this young man and his companions in debate, and from all sides the question was argued. Neh Kiem, by reason of his age, was constituted president, and it was he who determined the issues of the day. The problem was fairly discussed, but agreement was hard

Unscientific Essays

to come by. It was Nēh Kiern who settled it. "Can iron float?" said he when all else was said—and tossing his knife into the lagoon he spat upon the sand. There was finality : and it is only in whispers that iron ships will be mentioned for some time to come.

THE END

042/JON



11608

